Barbed Wire

Elizabeth Carfrae

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BY

ELIZABETH CARFRAE

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And while I looked above me and beyond
I saw my Promised Land set on a hill
Securely fenced about with barbèd wire;
Heard, at my side, a Voice that said "Break through
And claim the Land which thou desirest for thine own."
Then with my bruisèd hands, bleeding and torn
I wrenched aside the barbèd fencing wire
And reached at last the Paradise I craved.

BARBED WIRE

CHAPTER I

FROM the days of her earliest childhood little Joy Beresford had made up stories about the house hidden behind the big, grey, moss-covered walls just visible from the barred windows of her nursery.

She was always certain that, somewhere inside, cruel ogres ate beautiful princesses and she used to lie awake at night, shivering with terrified joy, over pictures of charred bones and buried skeletons. Even when she outgrew her actual babyhood and could spell out really long words of three syllables, lying face downwards on the ancient woolly hearthrug, she still loved to make up stories about those mysterious invisible beings who occupied the house behind the high walls, certain that some hideous tragedy was being enacted in its shuttered rooms and revelling in the thrills which imagination sent curling and twisting up and down her spine.

On one of the rare occasions on which she saw her father she screwed up her courage to ask him a timid question in her little, shrill treble. She had a barely-perceptible stammer which was always more noticeable when she was frightened or excited.

"Father, please. I d-do so want to know. *Is* there a g-giant shut up in the big house on the h-hill?"

Adrian Beresford stared at her eager little face through huge steel-rimmed glasses.

"Giant? What rubbish is this? Is there no one in the house to prevent you from cramming your head with such nonsense? Run away and don't ask such idiotic questions."

Looking back in later years it seemed to Joy that she

had spent the greater part of her childhood running away from the grim, austere person in the velvet smoking jacket and steel-rimmed glasses whom a long succession of nurses and servants taught her to call "father." It became a constant warning.

"Run upstairs, Miss Joy, your pa's coming."

"Miss Joy, get upstairs to the nursery quick. Here's the master."

Or on the rare occasions when she was really naughty:

"Be quiet now, you wicked girl, or I'll fetch your father."

She never remembered the lovely little mother who had given her birth. The servants who came and went in rapid succession said that she had died when Joy was little more than a baby. The Professor himself never mentioned her and no one in the village had ever seen her. From first one and then another Joy gleaned that the Professor had brought her, a delicate, fragile baby in the care of a hospital nurse, to the Ivy House, had then sent away the nurse and engaged a girl from the village to minister to the wants of his little, motherless daughter. She gathered that the Professor was regarded as "queer." It is quite certain that, whatever might have been outside opinion in regard to her grim parent, she herself cordially disliked him and was frankly afraid of him, keeping out of his way as much as possible. She spent most of her lonely childhood in the nursery or in the overgrown garden where hardy annuals did their level best to hold their own against the onslaught of the weeds that threatened to choke them. From one corner, where she had bribed the man of all work to knock out a brick on a level with her little brown head, she could still see the walls of the mystery house and, as she grew older, she spent blissful hours perched on the fallen trunk of an old beech tree drawing horrible pictures of all those gruesome happenings which she was convinced went on behind the heavily-shuttered windows and barred gates.

When she was eight a governess took the place of the string of nurses—a thin, hungry-looking woman of forty with a plain colourless face and a heart of pure gold—engaged at the instigation of the Professor's gay little sister-in-law who, even amidst the gaieties of life as the wife of a popular Colonial Governor and her very genuine

dislike of the Professor himself, found time to remember the little daughter of the sister she had loved.

Joy, accustomed to take what the gods sent her without comment or question, accepted the new arrival as she had accepted all her predecessors and surveyed her from the nursery window-seat with the uncompromising stare of an utterly unself-conscious child.

"I wonder how l-long *you'll* stay."

Miss Roberts was startled, as well she might be. It was not a particularly happy remark, since the poor lady had ardently hoped that she had fallen upon a permanent abiding-place.

"I've n-never had a governess before but there've been h-hundreds of n-nurses since I was little. They never stay more'n a month. Have you seen father?"

The juxtaposition of ideas was unconscious but vaguely disquieting, and Miss Roberts clasped nervous hands over a flat and formless bosom.

"I am sure your father is quite charming, dear."

Joy stared.

"I don't know what ch-charming means, but he's bad-tempered. Crochetty, cook says he is, but J-James the garden-boy calls him a sour-faced old devil."

The poor lady was horribly shocked.

"Devil is not at all a nice word to use, dear child."

"Isn't it?" Joy was surprised and a little hurt. "I thought it must be all right 'cos it's in the Bible. Hundreds of times over, too. And I'm sorry but I really think you *must* be wrong about it not being a nice word to use 'cos even God uses it. He t-talks lots about devils and He *must* be all right."

Whatever else failed her she had unbounded faith in her Bible, read it avidly and with shining eyes and gloried in the gory details of tortured martyrs and of Jezebel eaten by the dogs. She spent hours drawing pictures of these horrors and loved most of all her possessions a hideous chromograph given her by one of the string of nursemaids, of St. John's head, liberally besmeared with blood, lying on a huge gilt salver of ornate design and borne triumphantly aloft by an exceedingly fast-looking damsel in a costume chiefly remarkable by its absence.

Miss Roberts was in the house three days before she

saw its master and then he sent for her to the study, a room oddly characteristic of its owner, grim and cold and austere, shut away behind a green baize door.

He pointed to a chair and left her sitting there, perched on its extreme edge, while he finished what he was doing, then pivoted round on a swivel chair and stared at her in silence. Desperately against her will she found herself cordially endorsing the garden-boy's description.

"I have had a letter from my sister-in-law, Lady McInnis." His voice had the metallic rasp of a blunt saw. "She appears to think that my daughter should have a governess. She tells me that you are accustomed to the care and education of children."

Miss Roberts swallowed nervously.

"I have been teaching for twenty years."

Professor Beresford nodded.

"So I should imagine," he said rudely, though it is doubtful whether the rudeness even struck him. "My daughter has ridiculous ideas which must be removed, and I wish this done as quickly as possible. It is absurd that a child of *mine* should believe in the existence of fairies and such rubbish. I shall pay you your salary on the first day of each month in advance, together with twenty-five pounds a quarter to be spent on clothes for the child. See that this amount is not exceeded as I shall not hold myself responsible for any accounts sent in to me. I shall also place in your hands the monthly housekeeping money, and I shall expect you to see that the servants do their work a little better than they are in the habit of doing it. That is all. Good day."

He went back to his work and left her to find her own way out, which she did hastily, thankful to get safely out of reach of his grey, gimlet eyes.

"An—er—a very objectionable gentleman," was her last thought of him, and being a really good woman who had known and taught and loved little Joy's mother, she set herself to take, in the life of her lonely little charge, the place of the mother she had never known.

She stuck nobly to her guns, poor woman, though she shook in her flat-heeled shoes when the Professor came near her. Generally, greatly to her relief and to that of her pupil as well, who made no secret of her dislike for

her parent, though she had outgrown her fear of him, he left them severely alone. Twice a year, however, he appeared in the schoolroom and, standing grimly at the end of the long table, questioned Joy as to her painfully-acquired knowledge. She abhorred lessons in every shape and form, cared for nothing save reading and drawing, and she dreaded the half-yearly examinations with a dread only one degree less than that experienced by her governess. Whether the Professor was satisfied or not, neither Miss Roberts nor the child ever learnt. He vouchsafed no remarks and merely snorted disagreeably if Joy, in her anxiety to do credit to the trembling lady whom she really loved, stammered more noticeably than usual or made some more than usually startling assertion.

"I can't imagine a-anyone loving him, can you, Robin?" The examination was just over and both pupil and teacher physically, as well as mentally, exhausted. Its result was to bring back to Joy's tongue the little stammer which she had almost outgrown, and which was never noticeable except on the rare occasions of her encounters with her father. "Just think how a-awful it would be to wake up every morning and know you'd got to g-go on seeing him till you died."

Miss Roberts, smarting under the Professor's cynical criticisms, preferred not to think, and Joy ran on thoughtfully. She was sixteen then, very small for her age but with all her mother's fragile, gipsy prettiness.

"You don't wonder mother died, do you, faced with that every day? It must have b-been an awful relief to her. If I were married to father I should murder him in a fortnight or c-commit suicide. Unless I could f-find some one d-decent to elope with," she added as a happy afterthought.

"Dear child, ladies don't elope."

"Guinevere did. I'd have done the same if Lancelot had asked me." She was deep in the study of Tennyson's immortal *Idylls*. "I think it's a mistake to be too proper and respectable, don't you, Robin? But of course you don't. You're the most proper and r-respectable person I've ever seen. Dearest, darlingest Robin," she flung herself on her knees by Miss Roberts' chair, her little face flushed and her brown eyes dancing with mischief. "I'm

just longing to know, so do tell me. Have you ever been kissed? Not by a brother or an uncle or anything like that, but by a real live stranger. A truly-honest, passionate kiss?"

Miss Roberts blushed scarlet.

"Dear Joy, what can you know of passionate kisses?"

"Nothing—except in theory. But, of course, I've read about them. All the men in books kiss the heroines passionately, and I want to know what it's like. Do tell me, Robin."

Miss Roberts, who could not have enlightened her had she even desired to do so, took refuge in her usual platitude.

"You will know quite soon enough, my dear."

"I want to know *now*. Do you remember that girl who was staying with the Scotts the last time we had tea at the Vicarage? She's only seven months older than me—all right, darling, than I—and she's had lots of love affairs. She told me about them. Dozens. There's a choir-boy at the Cathedral at her home just mad over her now and she's got his photograph in a locket. I saw it. He's not the sort of boy I'd want to kiss *me*, but I suppose tastes are different. When I marry——"

Miss Roberts interrupted hastily. She had already sampled Joy's ideas of matrimony, culled chiefly from lurid novels purloined behind her back from the cook or from one of the maids, and she had no desire for a repetition.

"You are much too young to think of marriage, my dear."

"I'm not thinking about it, darling. I'm telling you about it, which is quite different." She dropped a kiss on the top of Miss Roberts' grey, neatly-coiled hair. "When I marry, my husband is going to be six feet high and *very* handsome. And he'll order me about in a big, beautiful, tender voice and I shall adore him. And have six children," she added cheerfully and entirely without embarrassment. "With two years in between each. Then, you see, if I marry young, say at eighteen or so, I shall get all the bother of having them over by the time I am thirty and have all the rest of my life to enjoy myself in. It's a mistake to spread out things like that. Such a worry and nuisance. Look at Mrs. Fielding; Godfrey's twenty-seven and now there's a new baby this week.

Cook says she's at her wits' end because she gave away the cradle years ago and all Godfrey's baby-clothes are moth-eaten. I really don't think that sort of thing is right."

Miss Roberts sighed hopelessly.

"Where *do* you get your ideas from, Joy?"

"Books, chiefly. And keeping my eyes open. You'd be surprised what a lot of interesting things you miss by being too respectable, Robin. It's like wearing blinkers. I'll bet anything you like that you've never spotted that Anna's walking out with the new postman. He was kissing her under your very nose when we came home from church last night, but you were much too respectable to see them." She shook back her hair. "Just fancy being hugged by anything as uninteresting as Jenkins. Even father would be better because, at all events, he does smell nice."

That night after Joy had gone to bed, Miss Roberts wrote to little Lady McInnis, far away in her West Indian Island.

"She is getting entirely beyond me, much as I love her, and her ideas are positively amazing. I am doing my best to keep her young and unspotted from the world, but if you could hear her talk you would be horrified. And yet I do try."

Lady McInnis threw the letter across the table to her husband.

"What can you make of that, Gerry?"

Sir Gerald read the letter through slowly. They were breakfasting early, as most people do in the tropics, on the netted veranda of Government House. Far away in the distance, through the soft green of the rain-washed trees, the sea twinkled and shimmered in the early morning sunlight, and on a pillar of the veranda a little green lizard basked in the sun while he waited for the grains of sugar which Lady McInnis always left for him.

"Worrying over it? What d'you think's wrong? According to your description of the ménage the child sees no one except the governess and the parson's family. What sort of ideas d'you suppose she's getting hold of?"

"You don't remember Cynthia before Adrian married her," Lady McInnis said thoughtfully. "I *do*. I wish I weren't so far away from her, Gerry. Somehow out

here it's so easy to forget things, and responsibilities at home, and she never writes. Robin says she hates letter-writing and all her lessons. She's just like Cynthia was at her age. I wish——" she hesitated, then changed her mind and said something quite different. "Are we going home this year, Gerry?"

McInnis laughed.

"You're very transparent, aren't you, my dear? You mean that you want to bring the kid out with you. You can if you want to. I've no real objection as long as you keep her under your eye all the time. I can't afford, in my position here, to get mixed up in undesirable comment or to let you get mixed up in it either. What sort of ideas do you think the kid's got?"

"I don't know. Cynthia was headstrong. Did you really mean that you'd let me have her, Gerry? I know how you feel about it, but I adored Cynthia, and if there's anything I can do to help her child I'd like to do it. Whatever her ideas are she's only sixteen or so and the ideas of a child of that age don't take much uprooting. Are we going home, then, this year after all?"

"You'd like to, wouldn't you?" The big man smiled at his wife over the edge of the morning paper. She was a little bird-like creature with the same exotic prettiness which had been her sister's and a very real affection for the husband who grudged her nothing. "I daresay it could be managed. At any rate you could go and bring the kid back with you, even if I can't get away."

She pushed back her chair, fed the little, waiting lizard and stopped on her way to the morning-room to kiss her husband lightly where the brown hair was just beginning to grow thin on the top of his head.

"I won't let you regret it, dear old boy," she said.

Three days after Joy's seventeenth birthday and three months before Lady McInnis intended to book her passage to England for the purpose of eradicating undesirable ideas, the gates of the big house on the hill opened for the first time in Joy's life.

CHAPTER II

TO Stephen Barclay, riding through the woods of Grey Towers on his way to Norton Valley, came the sound of a puppy's agonized squeals and he pulled up the big chestnut with a jerk, listening. A girl's voice, quivering with anger and fear, broke in across the puppy's cries.

"Bubbly, darling, do try to keep still. Only a minute. If you'll only keep still I could get it open, but you wriggle so. What a brute he is to put such beastly things about. Oh, do *try* to keep still!"

"What's the matter?" Barclay, with the chestnut tethered to a tree, went over the bracken and stood looking down at the little group.

"I should think you could *see*, without asking, if you used your eyes." Her own were full of tears. "Some devil has set traps in here and my puppy's caught. And I *can't* force it open. I *am* trying, Bubbly, really I am."

"Get out of the way and let me open it." He knelt beside her on the bracken. "Keep still, you little brute." His huge fingers in their thick riding gloves wrenched open the trap's cruel jaws, lifted out the little bleeding heap and laid it in Joy's arms. "I don't think he's badly hurt. Torn a bit and wants washing. Where's he belong?"

"He's mine. We live at the Ivy House. I'm Joy Beresford, Professor Beresford's daughter. Who dared to put such abominable things in a place that's a public thoroughfare?"

The big man in the faultlessly-cut tweed coat and spotless buckskin riding-breeches, shrugged colossal shoulders.

"If you use your eyes as you told me just now to use mine," he retorted equably, "you'd see that there's a new notice up to the effect that this path's closed to the public."

"Who's closed it? What a rotten thing to do. Anyway, if it's private what are you doing in it?"

Barclay grinned at her out of devil-may-care, dissipated eyes.

"The owner closed it, if you really want to know, and I'm in it because I happen to *be* the owner."

Joy, her hat off, the late September sunshine touching

her bobbed hair until the copper in it shone golden, her tumbled cotton frock smeared with the blood of the puppy in her arms and a splash of red mud on one pink and white cheek, stared at him.

"Good Heavens," she said at last. "You must be the Giant."

Barclay laughed.

"Why the Giant, if it's permissible to ask? I'm only six-foot-two." He was thinking what an attractive picture she made holding the squirming puppy, brown eyes wide with surprise, pink cheeks faintly flushed.

"I've always called the owner of that House the Giant ever since I was little. I used to make up the most thrilling stories about you. Where on earth have you been all these years?"

Poor Miss Roberts, placidly knitting one of her never-ending series of jumpers at home, would have died of shock had she been able to see her pupil just then. Joy at her best was unconventional, but she had forgotten the few lessons Mrs. Grundy had ever taught her in her frank curiosity.

"All over the world, pretty well." Barclay held out his hands. "Here, give me the puppy. There's a stream just close by and we can wash its leg. You're getting yourself in a horrible mess."

She gave him the little wriggling bundle, followed him docilely as he strode across the bracken and knelt by the water, watching him while he deftly bathed the puppy's torn leg and bandaged it in strips of his own handkerchief.

"He'll be all right in a couple of days. It's only torn and there's nothing broken." He laid the little beast, still whining and snuffling, on the bracken between them. "I suppose you've been using this wood as a short cut to Norton Valley all your life."

"Of course. You surely didn't expect us to go round." Her eyes widened then with remembrance, darkened under frowning brows. "Did you—*you* order those traps to be put into the wood?"

"It's my wood, you know."

"It was a—a *damnable* thing to do. Traps are inventions of the devil. How dare you do such a horrible, loathsome thing?"

"You'll admit I've a right to do what I like on my own property, I suppose?"

She flung back her curly, bobbed head.

"No one's a right to be cruel, especially to animals. It's a coward's trick. And you d-dared to offer to wash my Bubbly's leg when one of your own b-beastly traps tore it. I w-wonder you're not ashamed to look him in the face. A poor little harmless puppy."

"Has anyone ever told you how devilishly pretty you are when you're angry?"

Barclay's voice was faintly mocking, faintly amused, wholly admiring, and Joy's stormy little face flamed crimson.

"That's the sort of thing one expects from a man who sets traps for animals," she said furiously. "I'm only sorry I ever l-let you touch my p-puppy, and I hope I'll never, never have to speak to you again as long as I live, you—you coward!"

She was nearly sobbing with temper when Miss Roberts met her in the weedy drive.

"Dear child, what has happened?"

"The puppy got in a trap in the wood. A *trap*, Robin. And a beast of a man got him out."

Miss Roberts was puzzled.

"But surely that was a kindly action, my dear?"

"He had the traps put there. It's that devil from Grey Towers. The owner. He's shut up the path through the wood and laid traps. The great, hulking coward. I called him a coward to his face. *And* a few other things," she added viciously.

"My dear Joy, was that ladylike?"

"Who cares a hang about being ladylike when people are cruel? You don't seem to realize that he's done an unpardonable thing. Decent people, decent sportsmen, don't do things like that. Even *you* must admit that, Robin."

When Barclay drove up the untidy drive two days later, ostensibly to call on the Professor, but really in the hope of seeing more of the little virago who had genuinely attracted and amused him, Joy refused to speak to him or to come into the room as long as he was in it. The Professor, on being told that a visitor desired to see him, stalked into the drawing-room, stared at the big man

standing on the hearthrug through his glasses, and said what he had to say with uncompromising finality.

"I have no idea to what I owe the honour of this visit," he said icily. "I never receive visitors, and I neither know you nor wish to know you. If you have come philandering after my daughter, you have come on a fruitless errand. I have no desire for her to make your acquaintance or to make it myself. Good afternoon."

He went back to the study leaving Barclay, for once in his life, too taken aback to retaliate, and Miss Roberts, coming downstairs a minute later, saw him standing uncertainly on the doorstep, hat and gloves in hand. No one could be more entirely charming than he when he liked, and he spoke to her with a deferential gentleness that won her over at once.

"I'm afraid I've hit on one of the Professor's bad days. From his remarks just now, I can't truthfully say that he seemed pleased to see me or wanted to see me again."

Miss Roberts flushed uncomfortably. She herself was the soul of hospitality, and rudeness to a guest in one's own house she catalogued among the seven mortal sins.

"The Professor is not—er—is uncertain." She struggled valiantly for a word that was not actually disloyal to her detested employer. "I am sure he will be sorry later if he was—er—rude. We are just going to have tea. May I not offer you a cup?"

The moment the words were out of her mouth she was terrified at the recklessness of her invitation, but Barclay, if he saw that she had spoken without thinking of the consequences, elected not to notice and accepted readily.

"I'd like one." He put down his hat and gloves and followed her into the schoolroom where she and Joy still had their meals in preference to the gloomy dining-room. The Professor's meals were always sent in to him on a tray direct from the kitchen. "I drove over and it's hot."

Miss Roberts felt far from certain as to Joy's attitude, but the message she sent requesting her pupil's presence was a model of tactfulness though it found Joy in anything but a melting mood. She sent back a reply, delivered perfectly audibly by a maid who struggled nobly to subdue an irrepressible grin, that "Miss Joy knows there's visitors, please m'm, and she'd like tea sent up to her room."

Miss Roberts was utterly shocked and horrified, as well she might be. Not even Barclay's laugh of genuine amusement set her at ease, and she was heartily glad when he left and she saw the big car disappearing down the untidy drive.

"This sort of behaviour is really impossible, Joy." Upstairs in Joy's bedroom, she spoke almost irritably. "You put me in a terrible position. You are the mistress of the house and it is your duty to be, at all events, reasonably polite and courteous to callers."

Joy, curled up in her favourite window-corner, laughed. "Dear Robin, *I* didn't ask him to tea," she said with a little malicious twinkle. "It was your party."

"You are the mistress of the house," Miss Roberts began again stubbornly, but Joy cut in with her little square chin tilted to the dogged angle which showed argument or persuasion to be mere waste of breath.

"Then next time he comes I'll send word that I won't have him inside the house," she remarked decisively. "And that's *that*, Robin, dear. Let's go for a walk and forget the beast. He gives me a bad pain."

Miss Roberts sighed hopelessly.

"Will you never grow up and learn to be a lady, Joy?"

"If growing up and being a lady means having tea with men who don't know how to behave, I'll stay a hooligan to the end of time. I *won't* be civil to bounders, Robin." She flung back her curly head defiantly. "People who set traps for harmless animals and are saucy aren't fit to be received into decent society. If you want him have him to tea every day, by all means, but *I* won't come down."

Barclay called again a week later on the feeble excuse of inquiring after the puppy, but Joy kept her word, and after an hour's interchange of platitudes, with Miss Roberts squirming miserably on her chair, he left, swearing softly under his breath. Joy piqued his curiosity. He was honestly anxious to see her again, the more so because she was so obviously keeping out of his way, and women who deliberately avoided him were rare amongst his acquaintances. She was pretty, too, in a fresh, countrified way, original and unsophisticated, and originality covered a multitude of sins in a jaded mind these days. He waited

ten days, saw nothing of her either in the village or on the roads, and called again, bringing a book which Miss Roberts had expressed a desire to read, with the same result. Joy saw him coming through the schoolroom window and, with her little bobbed head in the air, passed him serenely in the hall and stalked upstairs with as much dignity as her five feet two would give her.

Barclay went home vaguely irritated. The whole thing was ridiculous. It was absurd that a chit of a girl in the school-room should set herself out to be deliberately and intentionally rude to him. Yet he knew that in the very fact of her inaccessibility lay her charm and attraction for him.

He altered his tactics after the third call and wrote to her:

> "Dear Miss Beresford,—I hope that you will use the short cut through the woods whenever you feel inclined. All the traps have been taken away and I shall be delighted for you or Miss Roberts to make any use you like of the woods or the grounds generally.
>
> "Yours very truly,
>
> "Stephen St. J. Barclay."

She brought the note to Miss Roberts, her cheeks faintly flushed.

"What do you make of that, Robin?"

Miss Roberts' sentimental soul bubbled with interest. Already her mind painted a little picture of Joy as mistress of Grey Towers.

"Dear Joy, you will write a nice little note in reply, won't you? After all he *has* removed the traps."

Joy laughed.

"What do you suppose he's driving at? He can't be in the least interested in us unless he's writing a book and he wants to study the habits of the cave-dwellers. Or unless," her eyes twinkled wickedly, "he's fallen in love with *you*, Robin dear. Of course that might account for it."

Miss Robert's thin cheeks flushed.

"You talk a great deal of rubbish, my dear child. The fact remains that Mr. Barclay is endeavouring to correct

any wrong impression he may, inadvertently, have made, and the least you can do in return is to answer his note politely."

"I'm not going to answer it at all," Joy said serenely. "The man is a fool and I have no use for him. I hope he'll soon go back where he came from and stay there."

But Barclay, intrigued and attracted by her independence a great deal more than he cared to own, continued to stay on at Grey Towers and hope for the best. Exactly what lay at the back of his mind he did not stop to think. He cursed himself for a fool every time he passed the gates of the Ivy House and yet he stayed on despite the clouds of invitations that descended on him to shoot here, there, and everywhere. In all the twenty-five years of his spoilt, pampered existence he had never met a girl who deliberately set herself out to ignore him, and the novelty amused him even while he was forced to admit that the amusement was more than a little tinged with irritation and injured pride. With too much money at his disposal from his earliest boyhood, with neither father nor mother and only a semi-idolatrous aunt to keep a watchful eye on his doings, he had started, in company with a bosom pal, by being expelled from school for being caught in the act of consuming whisky in large quantities in the prefects' common-room after call-over one night. Later he followed it up by getting sent down from Oxford permanently after a more than usually riotous rag, the result of which had been to send a nervous highly-strung youth in his own college into a mental nursing-home for the best part of the year after. Since then he had proceeded to go the pace pretty thoroughly in all directions. Most of his time he spent in Paris studying art after a fashion entirely his own. Grey Towers, which he hated, had been left in the hands of caretakers ever since his father's death twenty-three years before, and he was never sure what impulse had led him to come down and look at the old place now. He had meant, at the most, to put in a week there between leaving one rackety country-house party and going on to another. Yet, at the end of a month, he found himself still there and, for the good reason, as he told himself with a sort of irritated amusement, that a badly-dressed slip of a schoolgirl, with nothing startling to boast of in the way of looks, and with the

temper of a shrew, refused to have anything to do with him or even to speak to him in her own house.

It would have been ludicrous if it had not been so infernally tantalizing.

CHAPTER III

DESPITE Barclay's note with its permission to use the short cut to Norton Valley wild horses would not have dragged Joy through it. When necessity arose for her to visit the little town which, as she had little or no money to spend, was but seldom, she gamely tramped the extra five miles of dusty road sooner than accept even the slightest favour at the hands of the abhorred owner of Grey Towers, and all Miss Roberts' entreaties that she would bury the hatchet gracefully left her unthawed and unforgiving. She had never forgotten Barclay's final thrust at her dignity. Traps were bad enough —in Joy's eyes were, indeed, little short of criminal—but that parting shaft with its tantalizing, infuriating smile of scarcely veiled amusement sent the blood racing to her cheeks even now when it was nearly a month old. The knowledge that she had piqued the curiosity and aroused the admiration of a man who had been run after for his looks and his money by half the pretty women in London brought no balm to her angry little soul, and on the rare occasions when they did meet on the road, she stalked past him with her head very straight, and her eyes fixed unwaveringly on the road in front of her. Nothing Miss Roberts could say altered her determination to have nothing to do with the detested occupant of Grey Towers, and, though Barclay stuck to his effort to see her and make her speak to him, she dodged him with a thoroughness of purpose which amused even while it irritated him. He had been run after by women too long and too openly to allow him to take the snubs of this chit of a girl sitting down, and what had begun as a joke and a method of passing time, which hung heavily on his hands, became serious earnest with him the more she avoided and showed her dislike of him. He forgot her age, that she was barely seventeen, and a baby at that. Forgot everything, but that

she, a slip of a girl brought up by a ridiculous spinster in a back-o'-beyond country village, badly-dressed, hoydenish and shrewish, dared to show him—Barclay the Magnificent—that she cared nothing for his advances, and less than nothing for his attentions.

At the end of a month he gave up calling and took to sending, via the medium of Miss Roberts, baskets of glowing fruit and flowers from the hothouses at Grey Towers, a brace of pheasants or partridges which he had shot himself, and once a glistening, silvery salmon sent direct from his gillie in Scotland, all of which Joy ate with the enjoyment of youth and an unimpaired digestion, and for none of which would she utter one word of thanks or acknowledgment on her own account.

The climax came when, tramping home from Norton Valley along the hated road, a deluge of rain caught her unprovided with either macintosh or umbrella. In ten minutes her serge frock was a saturated rag. Her hat hung in unbecoming curves certainly not designed by any human milliner round her face, pouring rivulets of water down her spine, and her shoes squelched and chugged with every step she took. She looked a sufficiently pathetic figure to melt the heart of Shylock himself as she pushed her way through the streaming torrents with four miles still to go, with no shelter nearer than her own home and with the rain increasing in volume every moment. The height of her misery was reached when a vivid, steel-blue streak hurled itself through the clouds and the thunder crackled and roared round her. She was terrified of thunder, and just as she began to run, dragging her sodden shoes like lumps of lead along the muddy road, Barclay overtook her in the car. A second blue streak, followed by a roar that nearly deafened her, flung itself into space just as the car slipped and skidded to a standstill beside her.

"Jump in." Barclay's voice yelled to her through the racket. "Come on. You're half-drowned. What on earth are you standing there for? Jump in, I tell you."

For a second Joy hesitated. She was badly frightened, she was dripping wet, and there were nearly four miles left before she could find shelter. The car was warm and dry. It spelt safety from the blue streaks and home in

ten minutes. The temptation was almost too strong for her. Even Nature herself seemed on Barclay's side when suddenly his rather irritated voice decided her.

"Come on, you little fool. I shan't bite you."

She flung up her head. The rain poured in never-ceasing streams down the gullies of her ruined hat and between her drenched frock and bare throat. Her shoes were like leaden canoes, oozing water at every step, and another flickering streak of lightning terrified her, but she stared back into Barclay's half-angry, half-amused eyes with stony defiance.

"You needn't wait, thank you," she said distantly. "I'm much obliged but I'd rather walk."

"You'd rather——" Barclay gazed at her, then laughed outright. "Don't be silly, my good child. You're drenched to the skin and you'll get a shocking cold."

"I'd rather die of pneumonia and be struck by lightning into the bargain than drive a yard in *your* car," Joy said icily, and pushed on dismally through the downpour, very sorry for herself, very frightened, but oddly triumphant.

A mile from her own gate a second car caught her up —a little, grey runabout with a Cape-Cart Hood and side curtains securely fastened in the place of Barclay's huge limousine—driven by a boy shrouded in oilskins, with a sou'wester crammed down over his ears.

"Can I give you a lift?" The boy pulled up a dozen yards in front of her, peering out through the curtains. With one of her swift, comprehensive glances she saw that he was young—eighteen perhaps, certainly no more and might be even less—with a sunny, freckled face and the bluest eyes she had ever seen. "Good Lord, you're drippin'."

"Won't I hurt the car?"

"Nonsense." He spoke with the crisp voice of one accustomed to the giving of orders and clipped his 'g's' in a way she liked. "Come on. What a godless day."

"I've walked eight miles with six of them in this. It's been pretty awful and I'm frightened to death of thunder." She scrambled in and leant back while he stretched over her and snicked home the clasps of the side-pieces. "Another man did offer me a lift—miles back—but he's a person I particularly dislike, so I walked."

The boy laughed. He had a jolly infectious laugh which came into his eyes as well as out of his mouth.

"You must dislike him pretty thoroughly to prefer walkin' in this sort of weather."

"He's an odious creature but we needn't talk about him. I like this car. It's comfy and cosy."

"Drive yourself?" The boy looked at her. Almost pretty, he decided, in her own way. And attractive. Undoubtedly attractive. Devoid of the drooping, streaming, hat brim, saturated shapeless frock and soggy shoes, really attractive. Pretty eyes, the colour of bronze chrysanthemums with the sun on them and jolly wavy hair out of which not even the rain could take the curl. She looked like a little wood elf. At least, he decided that she would look like one, dried and less dilapidated in appearance.

"Me?" Grammar was far from being Joy's strong point at the best of times. Frightened or excited it went to the wall altogether. "No such luck. Father won't even let me have a donkey to drive, much less a car. I *could* drive though, I expect, if I got the chance. It looks easy enough."

"Oh, it's simple enough. Where do you want me to take you, by the way?"

"I live at the Ivy House at Allestree. It's the first gate on the right and it's well known here for two reasons. First, because there isn't a leaf of ivy in the whole place and, secondly, because it has the worst-kept garden for fifty miles round. It isn't kept at all if it comes to that. It just grows. My father's a Professor of Anatomy and he prefers bones to flowers."

"Why don't you look after the garden yourself, then?" He came to the conclusion that she was amusing. Unusual for her age. From his advanced standpoint of eighteen and two months he put her down at fifteen at the outside.

"Dear friend, you've got to get seeds before you can get flowers, or bulbs or something. Even *I* know that, and seeds don't drop out of the air unless they're the seeds of weeds. When Robin once dared to ask father for three-and-sixpence to buy a rake with he nearly ate her. He's not a bit hard up but he's got no soul. Here's the gate. I'm most awfully obliged. If father were different I'd ask you to come in for tea but I daren't. He's a devil about visitors."

"I'll take you up to the house." The boy swung the car in through the rusty hingeless gates. The garden certainly testified to the truth of her statement. He gathered that it was a "queer" household, wondered if there was a mother and who "Robin" was. The child was distinctly amusing. Unusual and original. He thought it would be worth while chancing the Professor's wrath and going in to tea. It was a damnable afternoon, and tea—with a fire—would be cheering. Besides—— He shrugged his shoulders and Joy saw him.

"Why did you do that?"

"You've got sharp eyes, haven't you? I say, suppose I chance it and come in. The rain *may* stop after a bit, you know."

"You can come with pleasure as far as I'm concerned. I'd love you to, but if father finds you he'll probably be horribly rude. I pretend that I'm not afraid of him but I am really at the bottom of me. He can be ruder than anyone I've ever known or heard of. However—— Look, drive round to the side door, up that little path to the left. We have tea in the schoolroom and there's less chance of our being seen. Thank Heaven it's a dull day and he won't be improving his mind by gazing out of the window. At least the chances are that he won't. Put the car right over there under that tree. It won't show so much there. Now then, follow me, and if you value your life, come quietly."

He decided that the whole thing was rather a rag, followed her with exaggerated caution, tiptoeing through the dim tiled passage. Joy's shoulders shook with laughter as she opened the schoolroom door and dragged him inside.

"Take off your coat and wait while I go and change." She poked the wood fire into a warm, glowing blaze. "I'm dripping right through. If father comes in tell him you're the piano-tuner. He's the only man who ever comes here and father won't know the difference if you bluff it out. I shan't be long."

She slipped out, shutting the door cautiously, and the boy, divested of his oilskins, wandered idly round the room. A rather cosy, homey kind of room, he decided. The sort of place where one roasted chestnuts and made toffee on

wet, cold afternoons. Nothing you could hurt if things reached the scrimmage stage. A big, chintz-covered sofa —the chintz provided partly by Miss Roberts from her own salary and partly by Joy, who had foregone a new frock in its favour—half a dozen worn chairs, two of them with high backs and big, springy seats, a rather ancient piano in a glowing rosewood case. A few prints in tarnished frames on the walls with a couple of quite nicely painted water-colours signed "R. Roberts" bound in passe-partout. A big, polished table covered with an ink-stained, green table cloth over which a white cloth was spread at one end, two rows of untidy book-shelves and a full-length portrait—Norah McInnis' gift to Joy—of a girl with brown eyes and laughing lips holding in her arms two ridiculous balls of white fluff which, on closer inspection, resolved themselves into terrier puppies. Distinctly a homey room with a cheerful "come again" atmosphere. It reminded the boy of a similar room where a woman with hair that glowed in the lamplight and who wore beautiful frocks had come every night to play with him before tucking him into bed in the adjoining room and kissing him good night. He decided that he was glad he'd chanced the Professor's wrath.

A maid with a rather scared face brought in tea. A plate piled high with steaming, buttery muffins, tea in a big, shiny golden-brown teapot, bread and butter, jam in a shallow glass dish, honey thick and creamy-golden. He realized with a start of surprise that he was hungry. It was months since he had been really hungry, *wanted* a meal, except of course for those first few days after the doctor had pronounced him out of danger. The muffins were horribly tempting and, moreover, getting cold. He took a step nearer, hesitated, another step and with finger and thumb took the top muffin and crammed it into his mouth. Lord, but that was good! Funny how often there'd been muffins for tea at other tea-tables and yet none of them had tasted like that. He took another with a furtive eye on the door. Vaguely he fancied that for a piano-tuner to be caught by the master of the house purloining muffins from his daughter's tea-table would mean immediate dismissal and might lead to awkward questions. He licked the butter from his finger-tips and put the dish into the fender to keep warm. He *was* hungry. He wished

the queer child would hurry up with her changing so that he could enjoy a good meal before he began to feel, as he usually did, that he didn't care a hang if he never had another meal in his life.

The door clicked, and Joy came in while he was staring again at the portrait of the girl with the puppies and was still feeling hungry. She had changed her sopping serge frock for something soft and golden brown that matched her eyes and put on brown silk stockings and brown shoes with square paste buckles. An older, more experienced, male thing or a woman would have recognized the frock for knitted silk and the product of Robin's tireless, flickering needles, but to the boy watching her it simply became something that looked jolly nice and showed up the kid's pretty eyes. With a golden-brown ribbon holding her bobbing curls into something approaching decent confinement, Joy felt that she was dressed as befitting the occasion. Miss Roberts would have regarded the production of one of her few really respectable garments for the edification of a stray unintroduced youth as little short of sacrilege, but Miss Roberts was prostrate with a blinding headache, actually undressed, and safely in bed and so——

She saw the boy's eyes on the big, happy portrait.

"That's my mother. She died when I was a baby." She went over and stood beside him, looking up into the laughing eyes of the dainty little woman in the picture. "The original painting was in the Academy the year she was married, and Aunt Norah had it copied and gave me that when I was eight."

"You're awfully like her." The words slipped out unawares even while he had to admit their truth. Add a little more poise, a little more development, and there would be nothing to choose between Cynthia and Cynthia's daughter.

"When I was very little I used to stand in front of that painting and try to copy her." She laughed, a little laugh that was half-amusement, half-pathos. "I used to pose for hours with my two puppies." She crossed the room to the table. "Come on. Let's have tea in case father comes. He's a regular nightmare in this house. Robin's in bed with a splitting headache, so there's only us."

"I put the muffins down in the fender to keep warm." The boy retrieved the dish with its smoking, buttery load.

"I ate two of them before you came, into the bargain. What a corkin' tea. Who's Robin?"

Joy, manipulating the teapot with the tip of her tongue protruding through what he thought were the most vividly scarlet lips he'd ever seen, waited until it was safely back on the stand before she answered.

"She's my governess. A priceless person designed in the pre-deluge days. I often wonder where she found a twin to go into the Ark with her. They had to go in pairs. That honey's home-made—grown, I mean—and quite good. Try it with the muffins. It's not half a bad mixture."

They were half-way through tea, chattering like old friends when a sound outside sent every drop of blood racing from Joy's flushed cheeks. A dozen yards away along the passage a latch had clicked with a vicious twang.

"Holy Heavens! It's father. He's seen the car. The piano. Quick. *Quick,* you idiot."

With fingers dripping with butter the boy made a plunge for the piano. Somehow or other he got the lid open, hurled himself on to the stool, was striking a feeble, hideously-discordant chord when the schoolroom door opened. With his back to the door he listened to the conversation behind him. He was shaking with helpless laughter at the absurdity of the whole thing but determined to play up. Not that he cared a twopenny damn for the old fool, whoever he was, but he realized with a sort of horrified jerk that the child had looked really scared; more than that, she had gone absolutely livid with fear.

Behind him he heard a snarling, rasping voice.

"To whom does that car belong?"

Then Joy's voice, outwardly calm, inwardly shivering with fright, only the stammer bearing witness to her quaking soul. To the boy, striking horrible, nerve-racking chords with hideous persistency and untunefulness in the twangy old piano, the stammer sounded oddly attractive.

"T-to the man d-doing the p-piano, father. I'm sorry if the noise is disturbing you. He'll soon be finished."

"I shall be obliged if you will see that he leaves the house with as little delay as possible."

The door shut, and opened again viciously.

"Why is Miss Roberts not with you?"

"She's in bed with a b-bad headache, f-father."

Then the click of the closing door for the second time," an odd, tense, little silence broken only by the discordant, hideous sounds at the piano, and suddenly a gasp of helpless hysteria.

"Oh, stop. For Heaven's sake. What *awful* noises."

He turned, saw her with her ribbon-circled head amongst the teacups, and for a second was horribly afraid that she was crying. He stood fidgeting uncomfortably from one foot to the other until she looked up and he saw her eyes drowned in tears of helpless irrepressible laughter.

"Oh, oh, if you could only have *seen* your back and heard those hideous chords. You made the most wonderful tuner. I nearly died of fright." She dried her eyes, and went back to her neglected meal. "That was father. He's not exactly—attractive, is he?"

"Not from what I've seen of him." The boy took another muffin, piled on the honey, munched it contentedly. "I say, what an infernal shame to keep you shut up like this. Don't you ever have friends to see you?"

"Hardly ever. I go to the Rectory about once a month but the Scotts are away now, and occasionally I go to the Singletons when Evelyn and Helen are at home. They don't come here, though. It's not much fun having tea in whispers and funk. And although I don't want to be rude and all that, I really think you'd better be thinking about going. It's not that I want to get rid of you or anything like that, but he *may* come back."

"Let him." Fortified by tea, really amused for the first time for many lackadaisical months, he sat back in his chair smiling at her out of those very blue eyes of his. "I'm not goin' till I'm ready. What's your name, by the way?"

"Joy. Joy Beresford."

He nodded slowly.

"I shall remember that. It suits you. Mine's Peter Conway. Peter William Forsyth Conway, to be accurate. I'm on my way home to my people at Valley Royal."

"Where's that?"

"About forty miles on. I'm on sick leave. Navy, you know."

Joy's eyes widened. She made no attempt to hide either her admiration or her interest.

"A sailor. How perfectly topping. What's been the matter?"

"Typhoid at Malta. Rotten game. I've got three months leave. Look here, I suppose I *had* better see about goin'. It's gettin' late, and the Mater'll be worryin' about me. But I'm comin' again. It's been a top-hole rag. I haven't enjoyed an afternoon so much for years. I say, are letters safe and all that? If I write will you get it?"

"I'll fetch it from the Post Office. Send it Poste Restante at Norton Valley. Do you really mean you'll write? *And* come again? It's running an awful risk, you know."

He struggled into his oilskins and grinned.

"I'll chance it, I think. It's worth it. I'll run over and take you out in the car. Teach you to drive and all that. Would you like it?"

"It would be absolutely wonderful."

He grinned again at the starry radiance of her eyes.

"Then that's settled definitely. It'll be a few days before I can get away. The Mater's sure to want me at home for the first two or three days. But I'll write and I'm comin'. Devils or no, I'm comin'. You're a splendid kid."

"I'm turned seventeen."

"And I'm eighteen-and-a-bit and fifty years older than you, anyway. Good-bye, Joy, old thing. I've had a ripping afternoon."

She gave him her hand, feeling suddenly very grown-up and self-important. They made quite a little ceremony of the farewell—a sort of silent vow of friendship.

"Good-bye, Mr. Conway."

"Rubbish. Say 'good-bye, Peter.' All my friends call me 'Peter.' Go on. Say it."

She looked up at him through shining, adoring eyes

"Good-bye, Peter," she said obediently.

CHAPTER IV

BUT for the telegram which arrived for Miss Roberts that same evening, it is more than possible that what happened afterwards would never have taken place, and that Joy's friendship with the "Conway boy"

would have shrivelled to a speedy and natural death under the glaring light of conventionality, with which Miss Roberts would have insisted upon surrounding it. The telegram, summoning its agitated and almost prostrate recipient to the bedside of a dying brother, altered everything, and in the rush of getting the poor lady away next morning and her distress overnight that she might be too late, the Conway boy's promise to write and to come again was completely forgotten. Even Joy herself scarcely gave the matter a second thought. Instinct told her that men —even young ones—said things for the sake of being pleasant, and it was not until sheer boredom and acute loneliness drove her into Norton Valley to post a letter, which she could have posted equally well in Allestree, that the Post Office clerk gave her a letter. Once the envelope was actually in her hands she realized how bitterly disappointed she would have been had he failed to keep his promise, though the epistle itself, written in an unformed schoolboy hand, was nothing very startling—the plain, straightforward, friendly letter of a nice boy to a girl he likes, devoid of either nonsense or sentiment.

"DEAR JOY,—I got home quite all right with hardly any more rain. It was awfully decent of you to give me such a topping tea. I can't get away from here this week as the Mater wants me at home for a few days, but I can manage next Tuesday if that will do for you. If you're doing nothing I could get over about 2.30 and give you a driving lesson, and we might run into Winchester for tea afterwards. I'll undertake to get you home by six. I'll call for you or, if you'd rather I didn't come to the house, tell me where to meet you. Cheerio.

"Yours,

"PETER CONWAY."

An ordinary-enough letter, certainly, but Joy was unused to letters of any sort save an occasional note from her aunt, and still further unused to romantic meetings with youthful naval officers or, for that matter, to most of the pleasurable pursuits of the modern flapper. Tea in Winchester seemed to her cloistered little mind unheard-of dissipation and undreamt-of bliss. In all her seventeen years

she had never been farther than Norton Valley, and it speaks volumes for Miss Roberts' careful training that there was no more thought of sentiment or budding romance in her mind when she accepted the invitation, than had been in young Conway's thoughts when he decided to do a kindly action to that "lonely little kid."

The composition of the reply occupied both time and thought but it was finished at last—a dignified little effusion that made the Conway boy laugh when he read it over his devilled kidneys next morning.

"Dear Peter."

The Christian name had been a difficult fence to negotiate. Joy was unaccustomed to intercourse with men, or boys for that matter, and to address a comparative stranger—and a naval officer into the bargain—by his first name seemed both presumptuous and even fast, but she remembered his injunctions and screwed up her courage at last.

"Dear Peter,—I was very pleased to get your letter and thank you very much for offering to teach me to drive. I think it would be simpler if you didn't come here, knowing the sort of person my father is, so I will meet you at the gate of the Parish Church. You can't miss it because it's on the main road.

"Yours sincerely,

"Joy Beresford."

If Miss Roberts had been at home there is no doubt but that Joy would have taken both the original letter and the reply to her for her consideration and advice. It was as unnatural for her to be underhanded or deceitful as it was for her to lie. But Miss Roberts was away and likely to be away for some days since her brother showed every indication of hanging on to life to the last possible moment. There was, therefore, no one to be consulted, though on the other hand there was no one to plant in her mind seeds of ideas which might otherwise never have grown there. With all her reading of purloined novels she was amazingly young and extraordinarily unsophisticated, and it never struck her to put into young Conway's action anything more than he intended that she should, merely the desire of a nice boy with everything in the world at his feet, to do a kindly action to a very lonely child who had nothing.

She lay awake nearly all Monday night praying for fine weather and when Tuesday did come, shrouded in soft, dull haze which meant a fine day later, was so excited that she ate neither breakfast nor lunch and nearly scuppered the whole thing by so alarming the cook at her sudden loss of appetite that the good old soul all but sent for the doctor. Dressing took hours, though her wardrobe was a distinctly limited one and she had only, at most, three or four frocks to choose from. But she had inherited a taste for clothes from her dainty little mother and what frocks she had, now that she had practically taken the choosing of her wardrobe into her own hands, were becoming despite their simplicity. The final result—her brown silk frock with the brown stockings and buckled shoes, which had been Miss Roberts' birthday gift, a brown mink coat made over from one she had unearthed, carefully packed away amongst moth balls and tissue paper in one of her mother's big trunks, and a little fur cap with a bunch of scarlet berries tucked jauntily into the crown—was satisfactory even to her hypercritical eye. She knew nothing of the use of powder and rouge. Soap and a rough towel were the only aids to complexion she advocated or knew of and she made a picture dainty enough to catch any eye as she walked demurely down the weedy drive and out through the untidy gates into the main road beyond.

Conway was waiting for her in the little car in which he had brought her home through the rain. It looked bigger and more imposing now with the hood turned back and the silver fittings on the dashboard glistening in the sun. Even the driver looked older, shorn of his oilskins and clad instead in regulation tweeds under a heavy fur-lined motor-coat.

His cheerful "Hello! Toppin' of you to come," scattered the shyness which, for once in her life, had been steadily creeping over her as she came to meet him. "Jump in, and when we're outside the village and the dogs and kids aren't quite so plentiful, I'll let you take her."

He was absolutely natural and his cheery *camaraderie*, his acceptance of the whole outing as part and parcel of a usual day's routine, put Joy at her ease more than anything else could have done. It was impossible to be shy

before his sunny good temper, and soon she was chattering to him as easily as she had chatted over tea and muffins in the everyday intimacy of her own schoolroom.

The curious eyes that every now and then glanced at her from the cottages and the few decent houses of which Allestree could boast, added the coping-stone to her enjoyment. Unaccustomed as she was to luxury in any shape or form she recognized it quickly enough in her new surroundings. The car was little, certainly, but it had every conceivable aid to comfort which the ingenuity of man can discover, and money was stamped over every inch of Conway's well-cut tweeds and beautiful boots. Joy had an unerring eye for detail, both as regards clothes and environment, and nothing missed her eyes in those first five minutes of spinning through the twisting little village roads, from the glittering silver and grey cord of the car's furnishings to the heavy fur-lined coat and gloves and very immaculate linen of its owner.

In a dream of sheer unadulterated happiness she listened to his driving instructions, his explanation of this and that gadget, the things a driver should and should not, must and must *never*, do. It was clear that his car was to him what a first-born child is to its mother. He handled it with the watchful care of a woman who, in terror of breaking him, bathes her first baby ; spoke of its petrol consumption, its hill-climbing proclivities and its general unbeatable excellence with the smug pride which a mother displays in the batting averages and swimming exploits of her only son.

Three miles outside Allestree, on a straight strip of deserted road, he pulled up.

"Come on, old thing. It's safe enough here. You take her for a bit now." He settled an air cushion at her back, twisted a nut somewhere which brought the driving-wheel to a more convenient angle for her shorter arms and lesser height, pointed out the accelerator and the brake. "That's right. Keep her at that speed. No faster in case something comes. Not for a bit at all events. Good Lord, you'll drive in no time."

She flashed a glance at him out of starry, dancing eyes.

"Am I doing all right ? "

"Absolutely. Just keep her like that."

He sat back, one watchful eye on the road in front, one on the vivid little face at his shoulder. A jolly little kid. She looked really pretty to-day and certainly worth the trouble of coming forty miles to take out. She'd got rather a fascinating trick of sticking out the tip of her tongue when she was in deadly earnest about anything. She had done it, he remembered, while she poured out tea from the heavy earthenware teapot, and was doing it now as she struggled to keep the car straight on the road. Rotten life, to keep her shut up in that dingy old house. He thought of his own sister, with her own little car like this, her hunters, the lake on which she had her own canoe and tiny, electric punt. All the luxuries that had made life for her so different from that of this lonely child who, on her own confession, had never had tea away from home save at the Rectory once in a while or with some people she called the Singletons or, on very great occasions, at the little pastrycook's at Norton Valley. It was a rotten shame. He decided that he'd speak to his mother. She was a thorough-going sportsman. Perhaps she could do something. As far as that went he could do a bit himself. Cheer her up now and then while he was at home, but he'd only got three months' leave, and for part of that he would be in Scotland shooting with his father. Afterwards, well, he'd be in China or Timbuctoo or God knew where. Certainly his mother would be the best person to apply to for help in his charitable intentions. She'd a weak corner for anything lonely and the child was obviously a lady.

A car shot round a curve in the road, bore down upon them. To Joy, gripping the wheel, it looked like nothing less than the Juggernaut itself, but it slid past with yards to spare on the broad road and she heaved a sigh of relief.

"I felt certain we were dead. She's a beauty, isn't she? If I'd a car like this for a whole week—all for myself—I could lie down and die cheerfully at the end of it. Don't you want to take her again?"

"No. Go on." He liked watching her, watching the way the tip of her tongue peeped out every now and then through vivid scarlet lips, the fitful colour as it came and went in her cheeks, the way her hair curled upwards round the edge of her hat. He compared her with other flappers he'd met. Flappers in Malta, in London, even some of his

sister's friends, though his mother was awfully fussy about the girls Netta knew. Wondered, with the cynicism of wealthy, already-run-after eighteen, how many of them, even at seventeen, trusted to soap and water for their complexion, and how many would have given all their attention to the driving of a car rather than try to attract him to themselves and their own charms. Came to the conclusion, just as they touched the outermost skirts of Winchester, that the comparison was anything but favourable to those distant damsels and that the kid was certainly worth cultivating. Could be a real, good little pal, he thought. And, after all, a good pal was worth something in these days when every female creature over ten had a watchful eye on marriage and money and the main chance.

When he took over the car where the traffic thickened he liked the way she sat in her own corner, remembered how Hilda Sevening, a friend of Netta's, whom he had driven at her own request over to see some friends only yesterday, had snuggled close up to his arm so that her scented hair blew across his face and the perfume of her soft, seductive little body floated up to him. Joy, on the other hand, sat in her own corner with obviously no thought but for the approaching town and the sheer joy of being where she was. He realized, with an overwhelming sense of relief, that nothing was further from her mind than that he should complete the outing by making love to her. He knew that, instinctively, and it made him feel very generous and big and protecting, sent a nice feeling of manliness and chivalry running all over him like little trickling rivers. He hated girls who expected to be made love to. The fresh salt air of his life at sea, the influence of his mother, who loathed everything cheap and sordid and who was, he realized, quite different from other fellows' mothers, had bestowed on him a healthy clean outlook on life that is as rare as it is precious in the modern youth. Vaguely he realized that, although girls ran after him openly, a great deal of his attraction for them lay in his money and in the title that would one day be his, rather than in his own charms and physical attraction. He had found that out even in the days of his preparatory school, when he had overheard a socially-climbing mother talking to her son.

"And, Arthur darling, be sure to ask that nice little Conway boy to come and spend a week of the holidays with you."

"But he's awf'ly quiet and booky, Mums. Not a bit of a lark or anything. I'd much rather ask Jackson."

And then the woman's voice, shrill, shrewish, horribly common.

"Silly little fool. Ask Conway. He's rolling in money, and Lord Heriot's son. Don't be so stupid."

That had been seven years ago, but the words still rankled, came uppermost in his mind when invitations poured in upon him, although he hated parties and loathed handing round tea and toast and sugary cakes to giggling girls who smiled invitingly at him, and to women who fawned upon him because they had daughters to marry off, and he was his father's son. A rotten world, sometimes, full of rottener people. Even Netta was getting ideas, had come down to tea one day when his mother was out, with her face liberally bestrewn with powder, and had sat in a corner giggling with young Saumarez. Obviously the only decent place was the ship. Equally obviously the only decent life the Navy. A clean, wholesome life that, where the salt and the wind and God's fresh, open seas swept away cobwebs and cleaned out corners where ideas, rotten ideas, would otherwise have found soil in which to flourish. He was glad he'd gone into the Navy. Still more glad that, at the end of four years away from her, he could come home and look his mother straight between the eyes, knowing that his soul had nothing to hide. If other fellows had mothers like his, well, they might perhaps be different. Have a chance of starting, as he had done, with no dark and dusty corners in their souls to make breeding-grounds for the ideas which seemed only too ready to take root anywhere. It was easy to realize, however, that mothers like his did not grow on every tree.

He swerved sideways to avoid a huge motor truck, slid to a standstill outside a shop where a continual stream of boys and girls surged up and down the stairs.

"This'll do, I think." He held out a hand, helped Joy on to the pavement. "The cakes are decent anyway. Come on."

"You go first." The crowd of gaily-dressed girls, the

lights, the flowers, the string band in the distance, took her breath away. It was unbelievable that she, Joy Beresford, could be about to have tea in these gorgeous surroundings, cheek by jowl with these wonderful beings from another world. He laughed—what a kid she was—slipped a friendly, brotherly hand through her arm. Funny how big and very self-reliant she made him feel.

"Scared? Come on. There's a table right over there where you can see all around you." He steered her across, helped her off with the big coat, hung up his own. She thought, as he ordered tea from the pert little waitress with the saucy eyes who had followed them, how clean and straight he was and how well-groomed. The few men she knew—the doctor, the dentist at Norton Valley, the Rector, were clean, certainly, but none of them had the brushed, polished look of this nice, big, freckled boy with eyes like blue periwinkles. Barclay had it, she remembered, but his eyes and his mouth had spoilt it, taken away its fresh wholesomeness and left behind something that spotless cleanliness and beautiful linen and clothes couldn't altogether hide.

She sighed happily.

"I'd no idea there were so many pretty women in the world. And what a glorious shop. And the music. Oh, Peter dear, I could truthfully die happy after this."

"I'd far rather you lived and came again, old thing. Besides, this isn't the real thing. Wait until I show you a few of the London places. London's *some* place, worth goin' to, believe *me*."

"Am I going there?"

"Of course. I'm goin' to give you the time of your young life until I go away, if you'll come. It's only three hours' run from your place. We could go up in the mornin' early, lunch there, have tea and get back by eight. What about it?"

"I'll wake up soon, I expect," Joy said ecstatically. "But while I'm asleep I don't mind these sort of dreams. Go on."

"Pour out the tea first, there's a good kid." A girl, slim, exquisite, nodded gaily to him as she passed, and he half rose to return the greeting, conscious of her faintly-amused eyes "That's a friend of my sister, Netta's.

You'd like Netta, I think. She's not a bad sort when she doesn't try to make out that she's grown-up ; and you'd adore my mother."

"Tell me about her." Joy bit into one of the little heaps of sugar and almond paste which did duty for cake. "What gorgeous cakes. Go on. What's she like ? Your mother, I mean."

He told her to the best of his ability, stumbling a little in his eagerness to do her justice, realizing the inadequacy of his description.

"She's always ready to go where you want her or to do what you want. She rides splendidly and she's the finest pal in the world. She's great."

"How old is your sister ? "

"Sixteen. Same age as you, almost. She's pretty, too, like the mater. Same sort of hair and eyes. She's at school most of the time and I haven't seen much of her lately. She ought to be there now but they gave her a week off when I came home to come and look at me. I nearly pegged out in Malta and I'm reapin' the benefit now. Look here, I'll take you over to see them all. You'd love the mater."

"Oh, I couldn't." Joy dropped her third cake with a stare of blank dismay. "Honestly, I couldn't. I know your mother's a dear. She'd have to be if she's your mother. But I couldn't possibly let you take me there. She'd want to know how you found me, and if even *Robin* thinks our acquaintance was a scraped-up, shady proceeding, as she said it was the night you came to tea, what could your mother think ? If Robin's brother hadn't taken so long over dying, I don't expect I should be here now. She *might* have let me come, of course, but she'd have had so many gloomy forebodings about it that there wouldn't have been any fun in coming."

"Let's hope he'll hang on a bit longer, then. Look here, there's nothin' to get jumpy about. I'll tell the mater all about you, and you haven't got the first idea right about her, or you'd know that she'd none of that sort of rubbish or nonsense."

"I'd heaps rather you didn't take me, though I *do* know that she's a dear. It's much better not, Peter. I'd love to go out in the car with you when you can spare time

and all that, but I'd rather not go to your home." Her starry eyes darkened a little. "Even now, I'll miss you when you go away. I've never had a real friend like you before and it's no use getting me into the ways of nice things. There'll be nothing for me to do all my life, you see, except to sit at the Ivy House until either I die or it falls down round my head. It'll be a race between us, I expect."

"Doesn't that old devil ever let you go about and enjoy yourself?"

She shook her head.

"He's not all there. At least, that's what cook says, and I should think she's about right. As a rule, he's quite quiet and peaceful, just bad-tempered, you know, like you saw him that day. But he does get sometimes into the most awful rages. I'm not afraid of him, though Robin is. She goes quite green whenever she hears him coming, poor old thing. It's a kink. My aunt told me that he was engaged to some girl years and years ago who ran away with the best man the day before the wedding, and to show her that he didn't care he married my mother just afterwards and treated her horribly just by way of getting even with all women generally, if you can understand."

"Sort of vicarious punishment."

"I don't know what vicarious means, but he seemed to have got it into his head that he was paying out all women just for *being* women, if you see what I mean, by hurting mother. He's not a nice character."

"Suppose I get the mater to come and call."

"No. Please. Indeed you mustn't. He might be rude to her. He so often is rude to people, and I simply couldn't bear him to be rude to *your* mother. Let's just go on as we are, Peter, please. I'm having such a glorious time."

"It's time we were starting back if you're to be home before dark." He paid the bill, tucked her into her coat. "I've thoroughly enjoyed it. We'll come again, won't we, what?"

"I'd love to. I'll go anywhere as long as I can get away." She tucked the big rug round her knees, curled herself into her corner of the car. "I could drive like this for ever till the end of the world."

He was really sorry when they ran into Allestree just after six and pulled up at the gates of the big, grey church.

"I've had a toppin' afternoon, Joy. You're a first-rate little pal. When can you come again? Look here, I've been thinkin' out a scheme. The ship I used to be in is just recommissionin' at Portsmouth. I know one or two of the fellows. Would you like to go over her?"

"Over a real battleship? Oh, Peter, how perfectly wonderful."

"Well, we'll do it then. Make it next Monday. You meet me here at nine in the mornin' and we'll run down to Pompey, go over the ship, have tea in Southsea and come home again. How's that for a day's outin'? Just you and me, what?"

She gave him her hand with eyes so alight with happiness that their very brilliance made him blink.

"I think you're the most wonderful person in the world," she said happily. "I'll be here at nine to the minute."

CHAPTER V

THE modern flapper of seventeen has seen so much and done so much that she has sampled most of life's happiest moments, and there is nothing really new enough to make her eyes shine and her breath come in little gasps unless it is something more than usually *outré* and startling. In these days of the emancipation of young women it is almost incredible that there could still exist a maiden over the age of ten, of decent birth and social standing, who has never seen either the sea or the ships upon it, or the yellow sands of the seashore, or the white wonder of the spray where it breaks on the rocks at the foot of the cliffs.

Joy's eyes alone gave young Conway food for thought as they ran down to the coast at Fareham, and she caught her first glimpse of the Solent's shimmering, restless waters, of the shipping dotted here and there over its surface, of the silent watchful forts of Spithead, and of the Isle of Wight dim and mist-veiled in the distance. In the sheer childish bliss of her silent ecstasy he found himself recapturing some of the sensations of his own early boyhood, the

feelings that had crept over him when, as a very small, very lonely little boy he had first found himself an inmate of one of those same grey ships which had caught and held Joy's fascinated attention now, and had stood waving a stolid and determinedly-cheerful farewell to a green-clad woman skimming shorewards in a very spotless little launch. He was a child again with her as he ran the car to a standstill at the big, familiar gate of the dockyard at Portsmouth, nodded a cheery "morning', Simms," to the grizzled old timekeeper in his little office, and piloted a very silent, wide-eyed girl in a heavy white fur-trimmed coat through the busy clanging yard to where a ship's boat tossed lazily at the quayside on the shimmering grey-green water.

A midshipman in uniform, just landing, hailed him riotously.

"Connie, by all that's lucky. And what's brought you down to jeer at us poor devils? Don't you know that no later than dawn to-morrow we're leaving those we love behind and going to play 'ten little nigger boys' 'neath the tropic sun and all that?"

"Where?"

"West Indies. I'll be back in twenty minutes. The Captain's got a bull-terrier pup on board, and he ate my mess jacket two nights ago for dessert. Mr. Gieve's kindly making me a new one on the hurry-up system, and I'm going to be fitted now. You'll find Scrags in the gun-room."

A harassed-looking first lieutenant, with more to do than time to do it in, glared at them as the ship's boat bobbed alongside, then switched the glare to a grin when he recognized the boy. It struck Joy, without surprise, that this big freckled youngster was a popular person.

"Oh, it's you, Conway. Thought you'd died of typhoid long since. Astonishing way you've got of blowing in when you're least expected. Come aboard, my son. How goes it? You look pretty flourishing for a corpse."

"I'm all right again now, thank you, sir. Can I take a friend over the ship? She's never been in one." He introduced them formally. "Mr. Stephenson—Miss Beresford."

Joy found herself shaking hands with a man whose grip hurt her fingers, but who grinned at her as amiably as a diagonal scar across his cheek permitted, and whose eyes were grey and very kind.

"Right-o. By the way, did I or did I not see that you'd got your promotion?"

"You did, sir. I was in the *Gazette* last week."

"Glad to hear it. All right. Run along. Perhaps you'll stay and take pot luck in the ward-room, Miss Beresford. We're in a filthy mess and everything's upside down, but I dare say we can find you a bit of bread and cheese."

"Like to, Joy?" He liked the sense of importance which the silent questioning of her eyes brought to him.

"I'd love it." She hadn't the foggiest notion what a ward-room was, but in the mood she was in just then, would have cheerfully accepted an invitation to lunch in a coal-hole had such a suggestion been made to her. The big man smiled at her rapt little face.

"All right. We'll expect you, then. Thynne's sailing with us, Conway. He's aboard somewhere."

For an hour Joy followed Conway and young Thynne—familiarly and for obvious reasons known amongst his colleagues as "Scrags"—in a breathless, bewildered silence. Even to a much more sophisticated person than she, a battleship is rather a wonderful piece of workmanship. There is something oddly-arresting and fascinating about its rigid discomfort, its spotless, ice-cold cleanliness, its glistening fittings and the echoing hollowness of its long, mystery-shrouded corridors. They showed her strange little cubby-holes, most of them strewn with unlocked, half-unpacked chests and portmanteaux, here and there one scrupulously tidy and immaculate, with photographs of fair maidens decorating the walls and still more photographs of other fair damsels arranged in bewildering array on bulkheads and chests of drawers. The severely-clothed bunks fascinated her, the mahogany and white porcelain fittings left her wordless with delight at their spotless cleanliness and perfection. Then they took her to where long racks of wonderfully-polished rifles glistened and shone in the light of an electric lamp overhead, showed her marvellous guns worked in ways still more marvellous, and led her to where rows of neatly-slung hammocks hung in long narrow flats, already very stuffy and hot and exuding the atmosphere of overcrowded humanity. And then in answer to Thynne's knock and a crisp "come in" she was taken into an infinitesimal day-cabin, beyond it an

equally infinitesimal, beautifully-neat dining-cabin, and still further into a polished, glistening sleeping-cabin, in all three of which, instead of photographs of many fair maidens, were different photographs of one very lovely lady signed "your own Frances," in every conceivable costume and pose. In reply to the unspoken question of her eyes Conway said, "The Captain," in an undertone, and answered, with a deference hitherto lacking in his conversation with other of these wonderful beings, the rapid-fire questions put to him by the owner of the crisp voice and the lovely lady.

"Glad you're better again, Conway. You've a knack of putting the wind up your people, haven't you? How's your mother? Fit? Who's this? Not little Netta, is it?" Joy, introduced and shaking hands shyly, saw a man rather over middle height, dark hair faintly touched with grey over the temples, with a humorous, kindly face and laughing eyes that belied the crisp, curt voice. "Come over here and see something pretty before you go. Some of these are worth seeing." He took her to a corner near to his desk where lay a little heap of wonderful ivories which he was unpacking from a wooden case. "Ever seen things like these? Rather wonderful, aren't they? I've just come back from the China station and picked them up there. Will you and Miss Beresford lunch with me, Conway?"

"I'm awfully sorry, sir. We'd have loved to, wouldn't we, Joy, but Number One asked us to lunch in the wardroom."

The man with the humorous eyes laughed.

"Trust Number One to snatch with greedy paws anything the gods put near enough," he said cryptically. "Make these two young heroes show you everything, Miss Beresford, and if they don't do it properly come along here and lay a complaint. I'll deal with them. It won't be the first time." He shook hands kindly, smiling at her eager little face. "We'll meet again some day, I hope. Glad you've got your step, Conway."

Of what she ate for lunch or of what she did Joy had barely any recollection. All she could remember afterwards was a long, narrow table round which men of every description, age and type, flung airy banter and chaff at

one another, mixed up vaguely in her mind with stewed mutton and enormous slices of very hot roly-jam pudding. She sat between the man with the scarred face and Conway, listening with fascinated ears to the bewildering skirl of conversation as it eddied round her.

"And this time to-morrow," a boy with a pink and white complexion sighed lugubriously, "we shall be wishing ourselves dead and be horribly ill. Can any of you tell me why nothing cures me of being seasick every trip?"

"Too many cocktails night 'fore sailing, Cherub, my lad." A man with the red stripe of a surgeon sandwiched between the gold on his cuffs and shoulders answered him from the other end of the table. "I've distinct recollections of the last time we sailed together——"

"Shut up, Scalps. We've heard your reminiscences before, and they're not edifying. You're lacking in sympathy, anyway, and in all the higher——" the speaker dodged a crust of bread hurled with admirable aim at his head, and proceeded stolidly with his jam-roll.

"—and as for her dancing, well, it's something to dream of." A sentimental voice lowered to a confidential undertone became suddenly audible in a lull. "Last night I danced seven out of eight——"

"Then her chaperon must have had a night off duty, Cotton dear." A jeering young voice opposite joined in the confidential conversation certainly not intended for his ribald mind. "Neither can she be right in her head, for you dance like an elephant on a tub. Which reminds me, *has* anyone seen——?"

And so on. The changeless give and take, hail-fellow-well-met atmosphere which goes to make our Navy what it is and our sailor-men beloved in every port—big, great-hearted men with clear eyes born of open spaces and hearts which have had neither time nor opportunity to outgrow the pleasures of youth.

Half a dozen of the younger members of the ward-room waved them good-bye when at last Conway and Joy went ashore.

"Think of us when you're having breakfast in bed to-morrow, Connie, you lucky blighter."

"I hope you'll remember me in your prayers, Miss Beresford. The glass is falling fast and we'll probably all be

drowned by to-morrow night." A sepulchral voice followed her over the ship's side.

Some one more sentimentally-inclined crushed a cap-ribbon into her hand.

"Got a sister who collects them," he explained hurriedly. "Thought you might. Lots of girls do."

"It's the most wonderful thing I've ever seen." Back in the bustling, clanging dockyard, Joy found her voice and looked at young Conway with shining eyes. "I'd never imagined that anything could be so wonderful."

The boy looked back over his shoulder at the little cruiser swinging with the tide. When he answered her the banter was gone from his voice. It was thoughtful and rather grave.

"It is a bit wonderful," he said slowly. "I can remember my first cruise as a midshipman. It was in that ship, three years ago, just after I left the training-ship. I can remember now just how I felt. The bigness of it all and the littleness of me, myself, and the importance of being even so tiny a unit in such a terrific thing as our Navy. I used to thank God every night when I went to bed for letting me be a sailor. It taught me a lot, that cruise did." He threw up his head. "It's a great life, my child. Let's go and shop-gaze along the Palmerston Road. It's *the* thing to do in the afternoons, I'm told, and unless I'm pretty badly off my course I can lead you to a tea-shop where they sell chocolates which even London can't beat. Come on. Tumble in."

He bought her chocolates and flowers, a book by a sailor-man with whom he had once been shipmates, without which, he decided, her education could not be completed, a photograph of his own ship, unearthed from a pile of similar photographs of other far inferior ships, in an Osborne Road photographer's, finally gave her tea in a cosy, pinkly-lighted, overcrowded tea-shop, and started for home just after five with a two-hours' easy run before them.

What happened afterwards was just sheer bad luck. They were doing a steady twenty-five along a perfectly level road when the right rear tyre sighed itself softly but surely on to the rim and they extracted a twisted, three-inch nail from the cover.

"Sit still. There's nothing for you to worry about."

Young Conway was out and had the car jacked up almost before she realized what had happened. " The spare wheel only wants fixin' on. Give me five minutes and we'll be off again."

It certainly didn't take him much longer than that, and they'd done another twenty miles of the fifty before them when a broken bottle left in the road met the front tyre and drove a triangular bit of glass straight through the cover to the tube. That meant longer. Not much, he assured her cheerfully, but a little longer, because he only carried one spare wheel and he'd have to change tubes. But even that was done in less than half an hour, and only his haste to get her home before questions might be asked and so get her into trouble, caused him to overlook a bare inch of cover not quite rammed home on the rim. It held for nearly four miles—the road was asphalted and dead level—then on a corner just as they rounded the bend it blew out with a report like that of an eighteen-pounder gun. They were trying to make up for lost time then—it was getting late—and must have been doing a fairly easy thirty. For what seemed to Joy an eternity, but could really have been no more than fifty seconds, the car skidded dizzily first to one side and then to the other, as the boy wrenched and tugged at the steering-wheel to straighten her out. There was another report and they bumped and staggered to a standstill at last with the two front tyres ripped clean off the rims and the inner tubes in ragged fragments showing through

The boy said " damn " under his breath and got out and to work without another word. The tubes were utterly beyond repair—blown into hopeless strips for eight inches on one tyre and nearly six on the other. He hunted in the tool-chest, found one other, spoke over his shoulder to Joy sitting quite still on the bank. He had never appreciated anything as he appreciated her silence just then.

" I've got one spare tube, but only one. I'm horribly sorry, Joy. I wouldn't have had this happen for the world, but it was a thing that could happen to anyone. One blew out, you see, and the skid dragged off the other. This is going to make you late, I'm afraid. Will it matter? "

Joy lied cheerfully. Not for worlds would she have told

him how terrified she was of what the results would be if by any chance her father asked for her and she was out after dark—alone.

"Not a scrap. Don't worry about me, Peter. Can I help?"

"No, thanks, old thing. I'm going to fix in this tube and then if no one comes who can lend me another, we'll just bump along on the rim to the next garage and pick one up there. You're not cold, are you? Take my coat if you are. I say, you were splendid over that skid. It was a nasty jar and most girls would have screeched themselves hoarse. You're a toppin' kid."

Even the sick terror of facing the Professor died before his praise. She squared her shoulders with a queer little air of defiance. Her father couldn't eat her however angry he might be, and anything was worth while if it earned Peter's praise.

The road was extraordinarily destitute of traffic. The only car that passed them had a dishevelled driver at the wheel, who, according to his own statement, had had every known specie of tyre trouble himself, and was even then running on an indifferently-patched tube with a bandaged cover. Conway, with one comprehensive glance at the back wheels, realized the truth of the other man's regretted inability to help a fellow-sufferer; and when no one else came, and the first tyre was hammered and levered into place, he packed Joy in again and, regardless of springs and treasured axle, bumped and clanged laboriously along the road to the nearest garage.

It was after eight when they finally got the new tube fitted, and were ready to start again. Overhead a cold, frosty moon bathed the whole countryside in a flood of silvery-white glory, and the road stretched like a white ribbon in front of them, as with every ounce of speed he dared crowd on, young Conway raced the car over the remaining twenty miles, which lay between them and Allestree. One by one the milestones slipped by, while he sat rigid and silent and watchful at the wheel, with Joy curled in her corner beside him. He was horribly upset. If Joy were caught and got into trouble it would be his fault and he would be to blame, though he fully realized that it would be Joy who would suffer. The watch on his

wrist stood at five minutes to nine when he pulled up at the gates of the Ivy House.

"I'm going to take you up to the house." There was a new ring in his voice, a hint of authority which she liked. "If there's trouble it's my pigeon."

"I'd rather you didn't, Peter. Honestly I would." In the moonlight he saw that her face looked white and worried. "I expect I can slip in by the side-door all right. Cookie's sure to remember that I'm out and leave it open for me."

He felt her trembling as he helped her out, flung a brotherly protecting arm about her shoulders.

"You're not really *afraid* are you, old girl?" Remembering his own home life he could scarcely realize that she really feared the grim Professor "I'll take good care he doesn't hurt you."

Joy laughed rather shakily.

"Oh, he won't hurt me. It's the things he says. Look, there's some one in the drive." Her voice sharpened with fear. He felt her shoulders stiffen and then suddenly relax. "Oh, what a merciful relief. It's Cookie. I might have known she'd been watching for me. Don't come any further, Peter. I'm quite all right now. Good night and thank you so awfully much. I've had the most wonderful day of my life."

"I'll write and let you know when I can get over again. You won't be afraid to come out with me again after this, shall you?"

"Not likely." She laughed softly. "I'll always come. Good-night."

He stood watching while she flitted up the drive, until he saw her join the woman waiting at the top, then turned back to the gate with a sigh of relief. He hadn't been exactly afraid, but he couldn't help feeling distinctly relieved all the same, that the figure in the drive had been that of the cook instead of the grim Professor.

Under the shadow of the untidy, overhanging trees, the old woman's voice reached Joy in a terrified whisper.

"Miss Joy, I've been fair crazy wi' fear. Master's been askin' for you ever since five o'clock. God only knows how he gets to know when you go out. I told him you'd gone for a walk, to town maybe and gone to the Rectory

for tea p'raps. Where *have* you been, Miss Joy? Don't you know as he'll well-nigh kill you, if he finds out as you've been out till now and wi' a gentleman and all?"

"Poor old Cookie. I've had the most wonderful day. I *was* a bit scared at first but it's all right now. We can slip in by the side-door and he'll have forgotten me for bones in the morning."

"I'm doubting it, Miss Joy. He was fair hoppin' with rage."

They crept together round to the side-door, creeping like burglars through the darkened passage and up the kitchen stairs.

"I've put you some supper on a tray in your room. Go quiet, Miss Joy. Don't make no noise for pity's sake. He'll kill me, too, if he finds as I've been mixed up wi' it. Get ye to bed now and keep out o' his way in the morning, see. Good night, dearie."

She was half-undressed, munching her sandwiches, when she heard the Professor's step in the corridor outside her room. For a second her heart beat suffocatingly, then she answered his knock quietly enough, a dressing-gown flung over her bare shoulders.

"Come in, f-father."

He opened the door and stood looking at her from just inside. His face was livid and terrible, his lips shaking with rage.

"Where have you been?"

She faced him unwaveringly, only the stammer bearing witness to her fear. It never struck her to lie to him. She never lied.

"T-to Portsmouth, f-father."

"With whom?"

"Peter Conway. We had three punctures or I shouldn't have been late."

For a moment she thought he would strike her, and shrank back cowering before the blazing fury of his eyes, and his upraised, threatening arm. Then his lifted hand dropped to his side and he began to speak softly, bitterly, cruelly, his fingers clenching and unclenching as he talked, the words stumbling over each other as he took the very foundations of her life and tore them to pieces before her eyes.

The greater part of what he said in the hideous half-hour which followed passed her unheeded and uncomprehended. Many of the loathsome things he cal'ed her meant nothing to her for the good reason that she did not even know their meaning. But here and there bits stood out in letters of blazing flame, dazzling and blinding her.

When he had gone, when his steps had ceased to echo along the corridor, she tried to piece together these torn fragments, and to make of them something approaching at least a composite whole. One thing was clear. The Professor had taken good care of that, not realizing in his blind, insensate rage, that the very weapon by which he meant to hurt her most was the one thing to which she clung, with the tenacity of a drowning man to a spar, through the sleepless night which followed.

Whatever she was—whatever she might become in the future, she hugged to her heart the knowledge that, at all events, she was not the Professor's daughter.

CHAPTER VI

WHEN the grey light of a November morning crept into her room next day, she had pieced together most of the fragments of the pitiful story. With eyes to which sleep had refused to come, staring into the darkness, she had lain only partly undressed on her bed, struggling to disentangle from that torrent of foul abuse which he had hurled at her over-night the main facts of what he had told her, and in the revelation of that pathetic little tragedy, she left her childhood behind her for all time. A great deal she was still unable to understand. She was too clean-minded, had been kept too ignorant of sin and the weakness of human nature, to grasp all the hideous things he had said, but the main facts were clear now as she watched the first flickering shafts of a new day force their way through the blinds of her bedroom windows.

Step by step she put together the clearer of the facts as the Professor had given them to her. Lady McInnis' story had been true up to a point. He had certainly married dainty exotic little Cynthia Forrest by way of

revenging himself on that other girl who had jilted him, but, in so doing, he had overlooked the fact that Cynthia herself, faced with the truth, might fight him with his own weapons or with whatever weapons came nearest to her hands. He could be charming in those days. He *had* been charming in the brief days of their courtship when it had suited his purpose to be so, and she never learnt the truth until the night of her marriage. To hurt her, as that other girl had hurt him, had been part of his scheme of revenge. He laughed while she winced and shrank in fear and horror beneath the stinging lash of his denunciation of all women. It is possible that something of his reason had deserted him in the hours of his own soul-shattering blow, but be that as it may, it is certain that there was something much more devilish than human in the pleasure with which he lacerated every inch of her heart and soul, during those early days of their ghastly life together. What might have been the ultimate end of it no one knew, because, at the end of the first year, when little Cynthia Beresford was at the last inch of her mental tether, John Halliday, alert, virile, and splendid, stepped into the tangle of their ruined lives, and proceeded to disentangle the muddle to the best of his ability. From the very beginning he made no secret of his blind adoration of Cynthia, and she, smarting and writhing under the ceaseless lashes of Beresford's vitriolic tongue, reckless, desperate, only anxious to hurt, as she herself had been hurt, flaunted her splendid lover in her husband's face and dared him to do his worst. Ultimately, she left him altogether, and went with Halliday, openly and unashamedly, to the house he took on the Welsh Coast, and lived there with him as his wife, almost happy and young again in the blind worship and care with which he surrounded her, and in the knowledge that she was soon to be the mother of his child. The Professor made no sign. Neither, by word nor deed, did he indicate to the world in general either that he missed her or that he wanted her back. In his sombre house at Oxford he went on steadily with his work, gave no heed to the gossip running riot around him, and when Halliday's letter, written through his lawyers, giving him necessary details and asking him to divorce Cynthia arrived, he ignored it, and, in the same manner,

ignored the two others that followed it. They might have been dead for all the notice he took of them. Halliday and Cynthia continued to live together in the seclusion of their little Welsh home, and, not until baby Joy was born, did the Professor reappear with his scheme of revenge almost complete, and claim the child as his own. On the face of it, from a legal standpoint, the claim was reasonable enough. Cynthia was his wife and she had been living to all intents and purposes, with him until within five months of the child's birth. It was useless for her to protest that there had been no consummation of the marriage. As the lawyers carefully pointed out to her, it was exceedingly unlikely that any man would wish to claim as his own another man's child, whereas a woman always fought—naturally so, they assured her graciously—for possession of her child, whoever its father might happen to be. When Joy was three months old, Beresford placed the whole case in the hands of an eloquent and eminent K.C. and won it hands down. The K.C. put his case so excellently, painted the agonized feelings of the unhappy father, separated from both wife and child, with such poignant feeling, that the judge even added a scathing comment to his decision, as to the iniquity of a woman who, not satisfied with betraying a husband's love, could also endeavour to steal that husband's child. To the Professor, it was almost the crowning point of his revenge. He refused definitely to divorce Cynthia, took the baby which the crazy machinery of the law gave into his care, threw up his billet at Oxford, and buried himself and the child at Allestree with his bones and his books.

Step by step, Joy pieced it all together, lying awake in the darkness of her own little room. It is doubtful whether the stain on her own birth really troubled her at all in those first hours. She had been too sheltered from the seamy side of life to understand the stigma of illegitimacy, and the relief of realizing that the Professor had no claim upon her, and that she could snap her fingers in his face, should she so desire to do, probably weighed a great deal more with her just then than the knowledge of the blot on her parentage.

Only one fact the Professor had hidden from her. Halliday was an exceedingly rich man, and his love for lovely

little Cynthia Beresford had been no mere passing fancy. He had a wider outlook on life than most men, and was blindly indifferent to criticism of either his words or deeds. The fact that she could never, legally, be his wife, at all events, not as long as the Professor lived, made not a shred of difference to his love for her. Abroad, on his West Indian plantation, they lived out their own lives, childless for the children's sake, wrapped up in each other and happier probably than many of the men and women, whose unions both State and Church have legalized. In the hiding from Cynthia's daughter the facts of her mother's whereabouts—both of which he had made it his business to ascertain—the Professor added the crowning touch to his carefully planned revenge and scheme of retaliation. It had not taken him sixteen years' observation of Joy and her character to know that her first step would have been to find her mother, and by so doing, cripple the ultimate result of his plans. He had hurt Cynthia, and he had done his best to hurt her daughter, who had been the living emblem of the dishonour and slur with which her mother had surrounded his name, as he had always meant to hurt her when the time and opportunity arose.

It was, of course, impossible that he should realize how very little he had actually hurt Joy, despite all his carefully conceived plans. The child's ignorance of the world and her almost startling purity of mind had saved her from the worst of his blows. She did not even understand most of them, thanks to Miss Roberts' careful teaching. Vaguely she did understand that there was some kind of shadow on her birth. A paragraph here and there in some of the housemaid's purloined and lurid novelettes, told her that children born out of legal wedlock were not looked upon quite as other children, by the more respectable and particular type of matron. She lay trying to puzzle out the reason, since the children, of whom she herself was one, had certainly not asked to be born. It seemed to her mind distinctly rough on them that they should be the ones to suffer, when they had so obviously had so little to do with the whole thing, but she banished even that thought before the housemaid's message, brought up with her early tea, that the Professor wanted to see her in the study in an hour.

He was drumming on his desk with long clawlike fingers when she opened the door and went in for her interview with him, and if he had hoped to find her either cowed or penitent, he discovered his mistake as soon as he looked up and saw her. There were shadows under her eyes that spoke of a sleepless night, but the little aloof attitude which had always irritated him in Cynthia, and still more in Cynthia's daughter, was more than usually noticeable about her, like an invisible, impenetrable fence.

He wasted no time over what he had to say, knowing that she knew nothing of the law, and could not therefore hold him to the bargain he had made with it seventeen years earlier.

"Now that you fully understand the position there is no further need for deception. You will leave my house to-day, and you will never re-enter it. I never wish to hear of you or to see you again. A certain sum of money was placed to your credit as a baby by your father, contrary to my desire. It has remained untouched ever since, and is in the City and Midland Bank. The address you will find in this pass book. I have finished with you. You can go, and if you have not left the house by five o'clock the servants will have instructions to put you out. That is all I have to say."

She went out of the dismal little room with the world spinning round her head, conscious in that first moment of one thing and nothing else. From to-day—to-night—she was homeless, without even a roof to cover her, and she had nowhere to go.

Suddenly the whirling steadied and she remembered Robin. Somewhere she knew was the letter she had received only three days before, with the address of the brother's curacy on it. What was the good of worrying? She could always go to Robin. Her spirits began to creep steadily upwards. Things weren't going to be so very awful. They might even be rather a lark—what Peter called a rag. Dear, freckled Peter. He'd be awfully surprised when he knew that she'd left the Ivy House. While she packed her few belongings, helped by the cook, who wept, and a housemaid, who sniffed at intervals, she decided to write at once and tell Peter of her change of address She chuckled, picturing Miss Roberts' goggle-

eyed stare of surprise when she arrived on the doorstep that night. Mercifully there was enough of the housekeeping money, which Robin had left in her care, to get her to Hallingham. She knew the cost of the ticket, because Miss Roberts had calculated it to the nearest farthing, the night before she herself had left the Ivy House. The car to the station at Norton Valley cost ten shillings, and the fare up to London six-and-threepence, third class. From London to Hallingham it would be another three-and-fourpence. She remembered it, doubly easily, because she herself had bought Miss Roberts' ticket, while that harassed lady harangued porters and fussed over her suitcase and her trunk. Travelling was, after all, a very simple matter. You bought a ticket, got into the train and the train took you where you wanted to go. It was certainly preferable to living and rotting and dying in the Ivy House.

It was when the sniffling housemaid went to the village, to order the car for the afternoon train, that Joy's question to the old cook gave her the first real glimpse of the ignominy of her position.

"You've been here years, Cookie. Did *you* know that the Professor wasn't my real father?"

The old woman stared blankly, then shook her head.

"What put ideas like them into your head, Miss Joy?"

"He told me so himself. It's quite true. My own father is called Halliday. My mother ran away with him before I was born. She didn't die, after all; that was a lie like all the rest."

The old woman fidgetted uncomfortably.

"'Tisn't a thing as I'd go for to talk about, Miss Joy, if I was you," she said at last. "An' the master, he'd no right to tell you such things at your age neether, even rememberin' what he is."

"What do you mean? Not talk about it? *I* couldn't help it. It's nothing to do with *me*."

"I know that, dearie. 'Tis the way o' the world. Things goes hard for babies as aren't legitimate if folks gets to know. Take my advice, Miss Joy, dearie. Don't go for to tell folks as don't know. Jest let sleepin' dogs lie. You'll find things'll be easier for you if you do."

She was still thinking of the old woman's words when

she stood alone on the station, waiting for the London train to come in. Clutched in her hand was her ticket and the purse Miss Roberts had given her for Christmas, in it all that was left of the housekeeping money, to which she had frankly helped herself. The pass book, crammed into her suitcase, with its jumble of indistinguishable figures, meant nothing to her. She had not even tried to puzzle it out. With the car and her ticket paid for, she had just over six pounds left. Six pounds four-and-sevenpence to be quite accurate, and to Joy, unused personally to handling anything larger than a ten-shilling note, it seemed unlimited wealth. But even the cheerful, reassuring clink of the money could not keep her spirits from losing a little of their buoyancy, as she waited all alone on the little platform. A woman, dragging a little girl by the hand, eyed her curiously. She wondered if people knew how strange she felt, going in a train for the first time, and starting alone on a journey to London—whether she looked as lonely and depressed as she was beginning to feel. Until that conversation with Cookie the depression hadn't existed at all. It had all been excitement at the prospect of the great adventure. Puzzled she went over it again. Why? Why? Cookie had said not to tell anyone. As though she herself had been guilty of something shameful, to be hidden from the eyes of the world. It was certainly nothing to do with her if her lovely little mother, driven to the verge of insanity by the Professor, elected—very wisely, her daughter considered—to seek happiness in other company than his. It was all very bewildering and muddling, though she knew that Robin could and would help her to see daylight. Robin could be horribly annoying if she liked, but she invariably could and did unravel the things which she, Joy, wanted to know.

She wished vaguely that she didn't feel quite so lonely, that there were some one she knew to speak to rather than stand alone, with only her piled-up trunks for company, to be stared at by curious passers-by. If only Peter would come. He was so sensible and reliable—so trustworthy. But Peter she knew was miles away, having tea, probably, with his beautiful mother and the sister he had talked of. For the first time she found herself longing passionately for her own mother, for anyone who loved her. She

wondered if there were many girls of seventeen who could only think of one person who really loved them. Just then, flung on her own resources, the realization of her loneliness swept over her more poignantly than she had ever felt it before, and quite suddenly she began to get pannicky. Suppose she couldn't find Robin. Suppose she lost her way or her money. Suppose—— She was perilously near tears when a cheerfully-familiar voice greeted her, and she swung round to meet Barclay's reckless eyes.

"Hullo, Miss Beresford, I didn't expect to find you here. I thought the Professor kept you locked up inside the gates."

She forgot her hatred of him before the awful relief of a familiar face.

"I'm going to Hallingham to Robin. She's gone away, and I'm going to stay with her. Are you going on this train, too?"

"Yes. I'm off North for some shooting. Look here, isn't there a maid or anyone with you? What on earth's the Professor thinking about to let you start off alone like this?"

For an instant she hesitated, then her inherent honesty flashed to the surface.

"He's sent me away. I'm never coming back. There's been the most awful row." She shivered suddenly, remembering his face as he had talked the night before, his restless, twitching hands and shaking lips. "That's why I'm going to Robin. I've nowhere else to go."

Barclay was reckless and thoughtless and wild, but he was very far from being bad, and all that was decent in him came uppermost as he grasped her position.

"Good God! D'you mean he's turned you out?"

She nodded.

"There was a row last night. I went out and didn't get back till late and he was angry. Angrier than I've ever seen him before, and that's saying a good deal. This morning he sent for me, and told me to go. Robin's gone to her brother, who's dying, and I'm going to her. I shall be quite all right."

The home signal dropped with a click, as the train whistled shrilly in the distance, and Barclay said something

in a rapid undertone to the obsequious porter who stood guarding his guncases. The man vanished into the ticket office, came back a moment later with a pinky-mauve slip of pasteboard, and Barclay touched Joy's arm.

"Here's the train. Give me your ticket or you'll lose it, and I'll look after your things."

He took the green ticket which she gave him, exchanged it surreptitiously for the pinky-mauve one in the hands of the waiting porter, gave half-a-dozen curt orders.

In five minutes he had hustled her into an empty first-class compartment and bribed an official to lock it. Her suitcase was on the rack over her head, her trunks with his in the van at the rear of the train, he felt oddly worried about her. She was too young, too much of a child, to be allowed to wander about the country alone. He'd never noticed before that she was really pretty. The fur coat, he supposed, made the difference in her appearance, and the scarlet berries in her cap. He sat opposite to her, cursing softly. To turn out a child of that age on a dark, dismal, wintry afternoon, with nowhere to go but to some God-forsaken village miles away the other side of London, was preposterous—a devilish thing to do. He watched her furtively. Funny kid she was with that queer little air of dignified aloofness. Funny, too, how differently he felt about her now that she had broken through her fences and was meeting him civilly.

"A damn good thing I happened to hit on going up to-day." He muttered the words half aloud. "Where in God's name is Hallingham? I wonder if she's got enough money? Or any at all, for that matter. She's the sort who'd start off without a damn cent. and count on it dropping into her hands when she wanted it."

He leant over to Joy watching the flying country with rapt, fascinated eyes.

"D'you know where Hallingham is, exactly, Miss Beresford?"

She wrinkled her forehead under the little close-fitting cap.

"I'm not very sure. In Buckinghamshire, I think. Mr. Roberts is the curate there."

"What time does your connection go on?"

"Connection?"

He explained patiently, aghast at her ignorance.

"You'll have to change at Waterloo you know, and cross over to Paddington. Didn't you look up the trains."

"I didn't think about it." Her voice sounded faintly troubled. "I suppose you think I'm rather a fool. But I've never been in a train in my life before."

"Good God!" He stared stupidly. "Look here. You don't like me, I know." He could be charming when he liked, and he tried his level best now to win her trust and confidence. "But, just for the time being, could you make up your mind that I'm not the sort of brute you think I am, and let me look after things for you. The idea of you wandering over London alone makes me sick. If you'll let me help you a bit now you can be as nasty as you like again afterwards. Is that a bargain? Come on and let's shake hands on it. We'll call a truce until you get to Hallingham and find Miss Roberts, shall we?"

Slowly she held out her little brown paw and let him grip it in his.

"Was I awfully rude and horrible?"

He smiled, showing two rows of very white strong teeth.

"Tolerably. Especially when you chose to walk home through the rain sooner than drive with me. You must have been nearly drowned by the time you got home."

"I should have been if the Conway boy hadn't picked me up further on?"

"Conway? D'you mean young Conway from Valley Royal?"

She nodded.

"M'm. He's a friend of mine. The row was partly over him." Under the influence of his cheery voice and devil-may-care reckless eyes, she was regaining her spirits by leaps and bounds. The feud was absolutely forgotten. "He took me to Portsmouth yesterday in the car, to go over his ship, and coming back all the tyres punctured. All but one, anyhow. It made us late and father caught me. He was horrid about it. And after all it was only nine o'clock."

"Was that why he turned you out?"

"Yes. He said a whole lot of horrible things. I didn't understand a lot of the words he used, so probably he said a good deal more than I knew. What I *did* understand,

was bad enough. I've always been afraid of him, although I used to pretend that I wasn't, but last night he terrified me. I really began to think he was going mad, and once I thought he was going to hit me. Then this morning he sent for me into the study and told me to go away and never come back. So I've gone."

He nodded slowly, wondering what lay at the back of it all, conscious of a sudden desire to strangle the Professor. It did not take a very vivid imagination to fill in the things which Joy had not understood. He'd done a good many rotten things in his life—confronted with Joy's trustful brown eyes he wished the list were not quite so long—but he'd be damned if he could see how a man could turn a girl of seventeen loose on the world, at a moment's notice, whatever she'd done. Besides it couldn't have been anything very awful. The child was an utter baby and the Conway boy as straight as a die. A nice kid with a topping mother. After all punctures were things that happened to anyone. You could never guarantee a car to an hour or so. Rotten treatment. Damnable. The act of a blackguard and a scoundrel. He hoped that one day he would be in a position to tell the Professor exactly what he thought of men—fathers of children—who turned girls out into the world alone to fend for themselves as best they could. A God's mercy he'd hit on that train. She'd be safe anyhow with him, and a day more or less wouldn't interfere with the Scotch trip. He'd wire Molly Fanshaw in the morning. Meanwhile—— He hesitated, then put the question which had been worrying him.

"I say, I don't want to be inquisitive, Miss Beresford, but what about money? Women are hopeless where finance is concerned as a rule. How much did you bring with you?"

Joy liked being classified as a woman. Instinctively, as all women did when he desired to make them, she was beginning to like this big, tanned, competent person with the dancing, smiling eyes, to wonder wherein had lain her hatred of him before.

"Heaps." She rattled the bag on her wrist. "I snaffled all the housekeeping money, otherwise I should only have had about two-and-threepence. Oh, that reminds me. What's a pass book, Mr. Barclay? Father—the

Professor, I mean "—he noticed the slip and its quick correction, stored that up too for future reference, and began to see a flickering ray of sunlight through the darkness that had puzzled him—" gave me what he called a pass book and said something about money being in it or in a Bank or something. I wasn't listening very carefully and I don't know exactly what he *did* say, but I've got the book here if that's any help."

"Can I see it?"

She dragged the suitcase from the rack, rummaged in a corner and finally found it. With her back to him, rearranging the tumbled contents, she missed his low whistle of surprise.

"How old are you, Miss Beresford?"

She laughed shyly.

"Just seventeen. And you needn't call me 'Miss Beresford.' If we're going to be friends you might just as well call me 'Joy' as every one else does."

"Right. I call that sporting of you, and while we're burying the hatchet formally you might remember that my name's Stephen to my friends. I say, did you know that you're a very rich young woman?"

"Me?" The frank astonishment of her eyes testified to the truth of her surprise. "Oh, *that's* wrong. I haven't a farthing in the world."

Barclay was making rapid calculations on the back of an old envelope.

"Roughly speaking you've a little over forty thousand pounds to your credit, my good child, according to this. A goodly number of farthings in fact. As far as I can see, somebody by the name of Halliday placed a cheque for twenty-thousand pounds to your credit when you were born, or just after, and it's been steadily accumulating ever since. Must have piled up quite a nice little sum by this time. Safely invested at six per cent. it ought to bring you in about two thousand five hundred a year. Not bad for a single young woman, by Gad."

"Two thousand five hundred? *Pounds* do you mean?"

"Exactly. What did you think I meant? Pennies?"

"Where is it?"

"Safely tucked away in the City and Midland strong rooms I gather. You're a rich woman my child. I con-

gratulate you on a nice little surprise. Which Halliday is it, by the way. I used to know some Hallidays. Wonder if it's the same family."

Swiftly she remembered the old cook's warning. "'Tisn't a thing as I should go for to talk about, Miss Joy, dearie," and for the first time in her life told a deliberate falsehood.

"He was a—a friend of my mother's, I think."

It was so palpably a falsehood that Barclay, knowing the weaknesses of men and women and the frailty of human nature, drew his own conclusions, and drew them amazingly accurate.

"So that's the trouble," he said to himself. "And that devil's told her. Poor little kid. Poor lonely little kid."

When they pulled into Waterloo, he bundled her into a taxi with her luggage and yelled: "Paddington, and drive like Hell!" to the sharp-faced Cockney on the driving seat, A glance, snatched at a Bradshaw in Waterloo station, showed him that the last train to Hallingham left at five-twenty. It was four-forty-five. With luck they *might* do it. All that was decent in him rushed to the surface before the girl's implicit trust in him, and the forlornness of her position. It would be a real relief to get her safely into Miss Roberts' hands.

It had been raining and the taxi skidded dizzily on the wooden paving. Joy, gripping the window-strap feverishly, wondered how it was possible for them to avoid a smash. The surging swirl of the traffic made her head swim, until she had to shut her eyes to blot it out of sight. Barclay sat with his watch open in his hand. He thought he had never come across a taxi that crawled so sickeningly. Once he put his head through the window yelled to the chauffeur:

"Get on, man. I'll give you a sovereign if you get me there in time."

"Can't get on no faster, sir. Road's up in front there. Got to go round."

They reached Paddington at five-twenty-three, in time to see the rear coach of the last train to Hallingham slide out of the station.

CHAPTER VII

BARCLAY said "damn" very softly and with more expression and feeling than he ever remembered having put into one short word before. Then he swung on his heel and piloted Joy to a tea-room in the corner of the platform.

"Let's have tea and decide on the next step. That's the last train for to-night, anyhow. Don't look so scared, my dear girl. No one's going to hurt you."

But he was worried all the same. Partly because the disappearing train had really made her unhappy, partly because he didn't know what on earth to do next. If she'd been a bit older, and a little more versed in the ways of the world, he'd have known quickly enough. As it was her age and her innocence, coupled with the trust in her eyes, baffled him completely. If he appeared at a hotel with her he'd lay himself or her or both of them open to undesirable comment, and while he didn't care a hang what undesirable comment people made upon *his* actions, since they could attribute to them nothing worse than had already been said many times with truth, he was sufficiently a man, and a gentleman, not to want a girl of seventeen involved in one of the many scandals that flourished like green bay trees about his name. Moreover, she trusted him to take care of her and he meant to do it. He thought of wiring to Miss Roberts to come up to Town first of all, then remembered that there was no train to bring her, and dismissed that solution. Second thoughts brought his aunt within the range of possibilities, but when he rang up the house in Mount Street, it was only to find that she had gone out of Town for a week, and would not be home before the following Saturday. He caught Joy's anxious eyes fixed on his frowning forehead, and cursed himself because his brain refused to work any faster. Then he thought of hiring a car and shouted for a porter, cursing again because his own car was at Grey Towers and not in London.

"What's the distance to Hallingham by road?"

"Matter of thirty-five mile, sir."

"Where's the nearest garage?"

"Just over the road, sir. No distance."

He left her at the table, stalked to the garage and argued for three minutes with a man wearing blue overalls and a dirty face. Five minutes later they were in a big, blue Daimler, luggage strapped on at the back, threading their way through the crowded dismal purlieus of the Harrow Road, creeping through the tram-lined death-traps of Wembley on to Harrow and Pinner, then out on to the Great North Road beyond.

A clock in a belfry somewhere struck eight when they finally ran into Hallingham. In the yellow light of the moon they could see a church rising darkly-sombre behind high iron railings. The lights of the local inn flickered out into the road as they passed, and Barclay touched the chauffeur's shoulder.

"Slow up, while I ask the way." He got out of the car, strode into the middle of the smoke-wreathed bar-room. "Can any of you fellows tell me where Hawthorn Cottage is?"

The barman looked up over the rim of a tankard he was filling from a shining tap. Barclay's impression—albeit a hasty one—was that the question came as a surprise.

"Passon's lodgin's?" A man in the rough corduroys of a labourer took the pipe out of his mouth, jerked a work-grimed thumb backwards over his shoulders. "Straight on, mister. Next house down t'road. Quarter-mile or thereabouts. He'm dead though."

"Dead?"

"Aye. Friday. Buried yesterday Ye'll not miss the house."

Barclay went out to the car where Joy waited for him.

"The brother's dead, they tell me."

She took the news quite cheerfully.

"Oh, is he? That simplifies things, doesn't it? Because now Robin can go with me wherever we want to go. I've been thinking things over on the way down. If I've really got all that money I can travel, can't I?"

"You certainly can." The car crept slowly forward with Barclay watching the road. He found the cottage easily, a little gabled ivy-clad place, set back in a square of fenced-about garden, with a light shining through drawn blinds of one window. "Wait there while I go and tell her you're here."

He pushed open the wicket gate, swearing softly because it stuck and was obviously off the hinge—without remembering that it had been deliberately unhinged to allow the passage of a coffin through its narrow opening—hammered on the little wooden door. Somewhere inside a chair was pushed back, and a woman's voice tired and rather peevish, answered the knock from the lighted room.

"All right, all right, I m comin'. Sakes alive, what a racket this time o' night and all."

He heard dragging footsteps cross the floor, the key turned in the lock, saw a woman, with a checked gingham apron covering a black dress, peering at him through the darkness.

"Is Miss Roberts here?"

The woman stared.

"Who wants her?"

"Never mind who wants her. Is she here? Good Lord, can't you answer a straightforward question, my good woman?"

"Yes I can." She was tired and overworked, snapped at him palpably. "An' she ain't here, neether, mister. Is that straight enough for ye?"

"Not here? Where's she gone?"

The woman's eyes travelled past him to the car and Joy leaning anxiously forward to listen.

"Where she's gone's more'n I can tell you. Went off somewhere Lunnon way wi' another lady soon's the funeral were over. In a motor she went. I can't tell you no more, mister, for I don't know."

"Is she coming back?"

"Not as I knows on. Rooms weren't hers. Belonged to passon, they did, and he'm dead since Friday. Took her bit of luggage and went. That's all I know."

"Have you got the address she went to?"

"No. She said she'd send it later for passon's things to be sent to. I don't know nothin' more, sir. Honest to God, I don't!" Perhaps she realized that something more than mere curiosity brought a man of Barclay's type, with a young girl, hunting her dead lodger's sister late at night, for her tone insensibly softened, took on a more deferential note, born, perhaps, of the big Daimler.

"All right. I'm sorry to have bothered you." Barclay fumbled in his pocket, crushed a bit of crinkly paper into

her hand. "It was urgent or I'd have waited until morning. Good night."

Pound notes falling from the skies were rare, donors of them people worthy of more than average amount of respect.

"I'm sorry if I spoke sharp, sir. I'm fair wore out. An' I were main fond o' passon. A nice, soft-spoken gentleman he were, an' no trouble. Good night, sir, and thank you kindly."

Standing on the step she heard Joy's voice, shrill with anxiety and something very like real fear.

"Isn't she there? Why? What on earth shall I do? Where is she?"

Then Barclay, quiet, cheery, reassuring.

"It's all right. You're perfectly safe with me. I know exactly what to do. Get back to town, driver, and hurry."

Back in the car he laid a hand over hers, felt it tremble, patted it for the want of something better to do. He would have kissed any other girl by way of offering consolation, but somehow, with a flash of intuition, he realized that men would not kiss Joy indiscriminately.

"You've got to trust me, Joy. Can you?"

"I don't see that there's anything else I *can* do. I never felt so utterly helpless in my life. What are you going to do with me?"

"You talk as though you were a bit of lost luggage."

He laughed lightly, feigning an assurance he was far from feeling. This, he told himself irritably, was what came of doing a kind action to a helpless woman. Here she was on his hands, indefinitely, utterly incapable and incompetent, and what to do with her only God or the Devil knew. Probably the latter. He patted her hand again, by way of filling up the silences, while he racked his brain for a solution to the difficulty. There was scarcely a decent hotel in London where he wouldn't see some one he knew. He could see already the nods and winks and nudges that would follow him, if he wandered in at ten o'clock at night with Joy tagging along behind him. He squinted at her sideways. Plucky kid, he decided. Tears were obviously not far from the surface, though her lips were set in a tight line to keep them from quivering. Very few of the people

he knew would believe his yarn if he told them the truth. Men in the set he frequented didn't come to the rescue of damsels in distress—especially pretty ones—from any motives of Quixotry. There was usually a much more plausible reason behind an action like his. He realized suddenly that, apart from his own feelings with regard to the smiles and veiled winks, he would hate like the devil to lay Joy open to insinuations of that kind. It never struck him that she might not understand the meaning of the insinuations. Girls of his own set, from the age of twelve upwards, knew every move in the game, and could have translated any innuendo into plain, unvarnished English, without any trouble whatever.

Hotels were impossible, he decided. Things to be taken into consideration only as a last resource. There was his flat, of course. He squinted sideways again. She looked dead tired, poor little kid. He wondered whether she'd jump out of the car with indignation and terror, if he suggested taking her to his flat for the night. Girls were extraordinary creatures. Blindly trusting up to a point and scared stiff a decimal dot beyond it. Yardley would have the flat ready—was expecting him, and supper could be sent up in a brace of shakes. Obviously the flat was the easiest solution of the trouble, provided that she didn't take offence and go floundering off the deep end. He tightened his hold over her hand.

"Look here, Joy. Just listen while I explain something to you. You're quite sure of me as a friend, aren't you?"

She looked up at him gravely.

"Quite. You've been awfully good to me, especially after the way I behaved. I wonder you took the trouble to bother with me at all. Is there any reason why I shouldn't trust you?"

There were half a hundred reasons with which he, or any of his friends, could have supplied her at a moment's notice, had they desired to do so, and he reddened a little under his tan, although, fortunately, it was too dark for her to see it.

"No. Why should there be? I've thought of the best thing to do. I *could* take you to a hotel, of course——"

She broke in swiftly.

"A hotel? Alone? Oh, I couldn't. I'd be terrified."

"Yes. That's what I thought." He was beginning to wonder what on earth he could do since, if a hotel frightened her to the verge of tears, the idea of the flat would probably send her into screaming hysterics. However, he stuck to his guns and stumbled on. "I've got an awfully cosy little flat of my own—sort of rooms to myself, you know, with just a man to look after me. I use them when I happen to be in town, and as luck would have it, I was going there to-night, anyhow. I wired to Yardley to get them ready, and my plan is to take you there. You'd be perfectly safe and not a soul would worry you, and then, to-morrow, we can think things out quietly. What do you think about it?"

"It sounds awfully nice. But won't it upset you dreadfully? I mean, rooms generally mean that there's just room for the person they belong to and no one else."

He stared at her blankly. Was she an utter fool, he asked himself savagely, or really as innocent as she looked? He had certainly never contemplated staying at the flat with her. Good Lord, what an impossible position! He'd end by finding himself in the hands of the police, for abduction or something equally horrible. With his free hand, he mopped the perspiration from his forehead, then, squinting at her again, realized that she was absolutely sincere in what she said.

"I meant to leave you there and then go across to the Piccadilly myself." He found himself stammering stupidly. He wished she wouldn't look *through* him like that. He felt as though some one had turned a searchlight on to the dark corners of his soul—wished miserably that he'd dusted them out a bit oftener, or, better still, never allowed the dust to accumulate in the first place. Her eyes reminded him of the eyes of a favourite cocker spaniel that he'd had to shoot. One of his hunters had kicked her, broken her back, poor little brute. She'd looked at him with just the same blind trust in her brown eyes when he had pulled out his revolver and shot her. "But, of course, if you're afraid to be left——" he trailed off uncertainly.

"I *am* horribly afraid of being alone in a strange place. I've never knocked about at all, you see. I hate to bother you so dreadfully, but if there's a room and you *could* stay——"

He realized that there was nothing for it, thanked God that most of the men and women he knew were away out of town somewhere. There wouldn't be much chance of his being looked up by anyone that mattered, anyway. It was going to be latish when they got in, and—oh, well, he'd taken chances before, and what was the good of worrying? If he was found there with her it wouldn't be an unusual occurrence, except that the other girls were —well, they weren't Joy with eyes that reminded him of the dead spaniel. It struck him that it wasn't for his own sake either that he minded, which was a strange feeling and one he'd never been troubled with before. It was entirely *her* good name that was troubling him. Funny the tricks the gods played you now and then.

The car slowed up. For miles the traffic had been thickening. Peering out he recognized the long, straight stretch of Oxford Street, the Marble Arch, white and ghostly, the flaring lights of a picture palace, the dancing sky-signs, men and women, boys and girls, arm-in-arm along the pavements. One side was up as usual. A row of red lamps guided the traffic into a narrowing stream, past Selfridge's new buildings, almost to the corner of Piccadilly Circus. At the Circus, a policeman held them up, his white-gloved hand gleaming large and awe-inspiring in the two dozen or so glaring headlights focused on it. It dropped at last. Barclay's strained nerves could even hear the click with which the arm of the law sprang, automaton-like, to the policeman's blue-trousered thigh. Inch by inch they crept forward. A taxi in front held a man and a girl huddled together in one corner. The light of a passing street lamp lit up a sleek, henna'd head pillowed against a smooth broadcloth shoulder. He grinned reminiscently, thinking how often he must have been visible under similar conditions—leant forward, muttered a number and the name of a street into the stolid chauffeur's ear.

"86, Jermyn Street."

Crawl again, a motor-bus this time, just in front of them, lumbering, noisy, its silly little bell tinkling irritably. Ting-ting-ting. Full up. It looked it, too. Lord, how he'd hate to have to ride in buses, strap-hanging, his toes trampled and squashed, his immaculate trousers used as

a door-mat by dusty, muddy boots! Beastly! Ten yards of open space, then the grunting of brakes hurriedly applied. A cluster of discreetly-shaded lights showed a tiled foyer, the beaten-copper and twisted-iron of lift-gates, a commissionaire in blue and tan, who came out to meet the car, touching a peaked cap with deferential hand.

"Evening, sir. Glad to see you back."

"Evening, Dawson. There's some luggage on the back. Have it sent up for me as soon as you can. Come on, Joy. Tired to death, aren't you? And half-frozen, too, you poor little kid."

He bundled her into the little leather-upholstered lift, steadied her as a pressed button sent them spinning three stories up. She was too exhausted and too utterly weary to do anything except obey blindly, the orders he gave her. She swayed dizzily, unaccustomed to lifts, when he swung back the gates and would have fallen but for the arm he flung round her, steadying her, while he fumbled in his pocket for a key. He found it at last, slipped it into a discreetly-painted door, opened it, letting out a flood of warm light.

"Here we are, dear. Home at last." The term of endearment slipped out unawares. She looked so miserably tired and forlorn. With his arm still round her, he led her along the little corridor into what she thought, in her weariness, was the prettiest room in the world. A fire, glowing in the grate, threw a rosy light over dainty, flawless Chippendale, costly china, glistening glass and, from a settee pulled up before its cheery glow, a man's long form slowly uncurled itself and stood upright:

"Heard from Yardley you were comin' up to-night, Barclay, and came—Oh, sorry, old man."

Barclay said "damn" inaudibly, thought rapidly, read the other man's cynically-amused expression, all the more easily because it said exactly what his own would have said under similar circumstances, and then added, almost apart from his own volition, the crowning act of folly to a crazy day's work.

"Glad to see you, Lancing. You're just in time to be introduced to my wife. Joy, can you wake up enough to say how-do-you-do to Captain Lancing? We've had a devil of a tiring day and she's absolutely all in. Wait till

I show her the way about and telephone for some supper to be sent in, and I'll be back. There's not the least necessity for you to go, my dear chap. Help yourself to a drink and a cigarette and I'll be with you in five minutes. Come along, dear. Bed's the best place for you."

He tucked his hand through her arm, got her out somehow and there, outside the closed door, stopped the bewildered string of questions on her lips with a hand over her mouth, whispering under his breath.

"Shut up. It's all right. I'll explain later. It was the first thing I could think of." He opened the door of his own bedroom, half-dragged, half-pushed her inside, raised his voice until it was perfectly audible to the man in the room across the corridor, "Your kit'll be up in five minutes and I'll send your supper in. There's the bathroom through that door. Get a good night's rest, dear. You've had a pretty stiff day and there's lots to do tomorrow. Good night."

He shut the door, left her wide-eyed and breathing hard just inside it, and the next moment she heard his voice coolly and deliberately ordering supper for three to be sent in as quickly as possible, by means of the telephone on the wall outside.

CHAPTER VIII

IT was characteristic of her newly-acquired faith in him and the astonishing confidence he inspired in her that even his astounding introduction of her as his wife and her subsequent incarceration in his bedroom failed to worry her unduly. There was doubtless, she explained to herself, some very excellent reason for both these extraordinary actions on his part, and until he had time to explain she decided that the best thing to be done was to accept the inevitable and make the best of it. It might, she concluded, be worse; even a great deal worse. She was in a comfortable room with a fire and, more consoling than anything else just then, with a bed. The thumping of baggage outside announced the arrival of her luggage, and a few minutes later a bland waiter from a

near-by restaurant brought in her supper on a tray, and deposited it cosily before the glowing fire.

Faced with the tray, she decided that she was hungry. In the next room she could hear voices mingled with the cheerful jingle of knives and forks, Barclay's rather nice tenor interspersed with the other man's deeper baritone.

She threw her cap on to a chair, slipped out of the enveloping fur coat and tackled her own supper, lobster salad, cold chicken and ham, péche Melba and a little bottle of something that looked like a pale edition of her customary ginger ale, but bore a name in French which certainly did not belong to the average ginger-ale bottle. She tasted it warily, decided that she liked it, and drained the glass at a gulp, her spirits climbing steadily.

Through the closed double-doors she heard Lancing's voice.

"You're never satisfied unless you're giving your friends jolts of some kind, Barclay. If it's not an impertinent question, how long have *you* been in possession of a wife of whose existence none of your pals had ever heard?"

"Ten days or so." Barclay's voice sounded coolly unemotional. "Surprised?"

"Well—slightly." The other man laughed softly, amusedly. "It's going to cause a few heart-burnings, what?"

"Let it. It's nobody's business but mine, anyway. Sorry Joy's so done up. We've been travelling the best part of the day, but you'll see more of her, I hope, before long."

Joy sat up very straight, listening hard. The champagne had brought a flush to her cheeks and a light to her eyes. Incidentally it had also produced in her mind the comforting feeling that nothing really mattered very much and that she was horribly sleepy. Vaguely she heard Lancing's voice again.

"Staying up long? I'll have to see about arranging a celebration."

"Thanks. Joy'd probably enjoy that. As a matter of fact our plans are a bit hazy. London for a week or so, I think, and then Paris or Italy over the bad weather."

She listened dazedly. What on earth was he talking about? The man must have gone perfectly crazy. She

tried hard to keep awake and listen a little longer, but the heat of the fire and the unaccustomed champagne together made her stupid and muddled. The voices grew far away and unreal as she slowly undressed. Even the cold water into which she plunged her hot, flushed face could not rouse her, and she was asleep three seconds after her head touched the pillow. Neither the voices in the room beyond nor the click of the main door as Barclay saw Lancing out just after one o'clock woke her. She was young and unused to champagne, and dead-beat, and she slept like an utterly exhausted child.

Standing at the open door, waiting for the lift to come up, a man with a hard, cynical mouth and steely, grey eyes stopped for a second as he walked up the stairs, to speak to Barclay and Lancing.

"Hullo, Barclay. Back already? Thought you were shooting and dallying after the fair Molly. What's brought you back to this abode of vice?"

Lancing struck in before Barclay had time to do more than stifle an angry curse.

"Marriage, of all surprising things. The fair Molly's a back number these days, Corday. Our one and only Stephen's got himself caught at last."

"That so? Ah, well, it's a well-known fact that truth is stranger than fiction. Congratulations, my dear Barclay. Do I know the lady?"

"No." Barclay spoke shortly. He might have known some horrible thing would be the result of this day's work, and a fine nestful of trouble he'd found this time, anyway. Got himself saddled with a wife and God knew what else. The lift came up with a clatter, and he said good-night, with far more cordiality than he felt to Lancing disappearing groundwards, refused the other man's invitation to come up for a drink before turning in, and shut the flat door with a bang.

He was tired and worried to death. There, behind the closed door on his right, slept a fictitious wife, and the two most inveterate gossips in London knew about it and one had seen her. What in God's name had ever put such a fool thought into his mind, and, worse still, on to his lips, and who on earth ever thought of Lancing turning up? Just rotten bad luck. The sort of luck that scurvy

Fate wished on people who for once tried to do a decent action. To-morrow his marriage would be the talk of half the clubs in London. Lancing would see to that, and Corday, whom he loathed, could be trusted to spread the news in that section of society which *he* most frequented. A pretty state of affairs. A perfectly damnable state of affairs, in fact, and how the devil they were to be straightened out—well, only the devil knew.

He went back to the settee and slumped himself down into a heap before the fire. Then got up again and crossed to the folding-doors, speaking very softly:

"Are you awake, Joy?"

He repeated the question twice, got no answer, and went back to the fire. Asleep, of course, poor little kid. Tired out, and no wonder. He found himself thinking very kindly of her, which was all the more surprising seeing that to her he owed the disquieting state of affairs which was now worrying him. She was so trustful, and, as a rule, trust was not the feeling he inspired in women. He laughed rather ruefully, remembering that his efforts had not been solely directed towards the inspiration of trust during the past six or eight years. Laughed again with more amusement this time as he thought of Lancing's altered expression when he introduced Joy as his wife. That had been the only amusing bit of a perfectly hellish day. Lancing had been so sure of his ground, and it *had* been a rag to watch the cynicism die and that blank stare of amazement take its place. But the day on the whole had been hellish—absolutely hell—— He stopped suddenly, his train of thought colliding, as it were, with a train coming in exactly the opposite direction. Had it been such a hellish day after all? Hadn't he rather enjoyed it, taking it all round? He was tired, of course, hideously tired, but hadn't it been rather nice, looking back on it, to remember Joy's trustful eyes and the way the light came back to them when he promised to look after her and see her safely into Miss Roberts' hands. Faced with that recollection he had to admit that, so far from being a hellish day, it hadn't been a bad day at all. He'd rather enjoyed playing Don Quixote, flattered himself that he'd played it pretty well, considering that it was a part wholly strange to him. It was a satisfactory, soul-uplifting part to play,

he decided. Gave him a comfortable sense of duty well done and superiority over his neighbours which was an unusual sensation. Joy had been so blindly trusting. Even when he'd taken the wind out of her sails with that mad and utterly insane introduction of her as his wife, and had shoved her into his bedroom, she'd accepted his word that it was the only thing to do with the same implicit confidence with which she had accepted his offer of the flat for the night.

Thinking it over quietly he decided, very unwillingly, and cursing himself for a sentimental fool meanwhile, that the few words by which he had hanged a millstone about his neck and laid himself open to the immediate danger of drowning, had had a pleasing sound when spoken in connection with Joy. He had never imagined himself with a wife. It was, he was forced to admit, a startling discovery to find that he liked the idea. The more he thought of it the more it pleased him. He repeated it to himself. "You're just in time to meet my wife." My *wife*? Yes, distinctly a nice sound. He tried to picture it as applying to any of the other girls who, from time to time, had flitted in and out of the flat, and failed lamentably. He couldn't imagine it in connection with Jennie Dormer, for instance, nor Sadie Harvey, nor even Isabel Godfrey, though Isabel ran a better race than the others. But his wife? No. Somehow the cap didn't fit as it fitted Joy. Girls, he decided, had not been his strong suit. He really preferred married women. They were less trouble. Gave him less cause for introspection and didn't ask inconvenient questions. He tried to think of Molly Fanshaw as Molly Barclay, even supposing poor old Fanshaw with his ugly face to be non-existent, and failed there. Something missing obviously, though what it was he couldn't for the life of him explain. It certainly wasn't looks. Joy wasn't in the same street with Molly Fanshaw when it came to the matter of looks. Couldn't even compete with Jennie or Isabel as far as that went. Couldn't really get far in a race with any of the damsels on whom it had pleased him to shed the light of his approval during the past six or seven years. Then, why did the title fit her so admirably? Funny, damned funny! He sat staring at the fire until it was merely a heap of glowing ashes,

endeavouring to solve the puzzle, gave it up as insoluble and finally went to bed, still thinking.

He was nearly asleep in the little spare room opposite his own where Joy slept, when a blinding searchlight of realization flashed into his brain and jerked him suddenly upright, wide awake and amazed, almost breathless with the colossal magnitude of the knowledge which it woke to life.

By all the Seven Wonders of the World he was in love with her.

CHAPTER IX

HE found Joy in the little dining-room waiting for him when the gong summoned him to breakfast next morning. The night's rest had done her good, and she looked fresh and dainty enough to please even his fastidious eye, when he bade her a cheery good-morning and pulled out a chair for her behind the coffee pot.

"Slept well? You're looking splendid." He helped himself to kidneys and bacon at the sideboard, brought hers over to her. "Two lumps of sugar, please, and about three drops of milk. That's right. You needn't wait, Yardley."

The imperturbable Yardley left regretfully, curiosity raging behind his expressionless mask. He was an excellent servant, accustomed to the eccentricities of a master who admitted the existence of no laws save those of his own framing, but even he had had a shock when, on taking in Barclay's tea that morning, he had found the room occupied by a lady, who not only responded cheerfully to his embarrassed apologies, but appeared utterly and entirely at ease in what seemed to him, at best, but an equivocal position. He left the door hopefully on the latch and felt naturally hurt when, two minutes later, Barclay got up and shut it with a definite click, that admitted no doubt as to his intentions.

Across the table Barclay watched Joy. She was absolutely at ease with him, eating her breakfast with frank enjoyment, and, of the two, he was by far the more embar-

rassed. It would have been easier to talk to her, and to say what he had to say, had she been older, less unsophisticated. He knew, perfectly well, what he wanted to say, but he knew, too, that it would be wiser to go warily with her. Ultimately, it was she herself who started the ball rolling, while she watched him lighting his after-breakfast cigarette at the opposite end of the intimate little table.

"Have you decided how to start looking for Robin, Mr. Barclay?"

"Getting tired of me?"

She flushed.

"No. But even I know that I can't go on staying here indefinitely. I've either got to find Robin or to make some sort of arrangements for myself."

"Would you *like* to stay on here indefinitely? At least, to stay with me? Not of necessity here, but wherever I happened to be?"

"What on earth do you mean?"

He got up, crossed to the fireplace, striking another match with unnecessary care and deliberation.

"Will you marry me, Joy?"

The silence that followed lasted so long that at last he gave up striking matches and turned to look at her. She was staring at him with parted lips and startled, almost frightened eyes, and suddenly he came across the room to her chair.

"There's nothing to be afraid of, kiddie. I'm sorry if I startled you. He touched her fingers, resting on the arm of her carved mahogany chair, with a tentative hand, felt them close over his with a little convulsive grip. "Doesn't the idea appeal to you?"

She laughed rather breathlessly.

"I never thought about it. Honestly I didn't."

"There's no one else, is there?" He was surprised at his own earnestness. Astonished at the anxiety with which he awaited her answer. He—Barclay the Magnificent—on his knees, metaphorically, at last.

"No, of course not. How could there be? Why do you want me to marry you, Mr. Barclay? Is it just because you're sorry for me and don't know what to do with me?"

"No. I'm head over ears in love with you. That's

why, though I didn't know it myself until last night. Will you, Joy? You don't actually dislike me any more, do you?"

"I like you awfully. You've been splendid and most tremendously kind. I don't know what in the world I should have done without you, and, of course, it would be a great relief to be married and have a husband to look after things for me. The question is, whether just liking you is enough. For you, I mean. I've always read—I've had no actual experience you see—that you've got to feel something a great deal bigger than just liking for the man you marry, though I haven't the least idea what it really is that you ought to feel. Perhaps you know and could tell me. I do like you, and it's quite possible that I love you in the proper way, but it's a great risk for you, I should think. It would be pretty awful for you if I married you just *thinking* that I loved you, and then fell in love with someone else afterwards, like my mother did. And that reminds me. Cookie said I wasn't to tell anyone, but you may change your mind about wanting to marry me when you know, and it's only fair to give you the chance to back out before it's too late. I'm not the Professor's daughter, Mr. Barclay. My mother ran away with someone called Halliday. He's my father. That's why the money was in the Bank. He put it in for me. Does that make any difference?"

"Not a shred. It's you I want to marry, Joy, not your family tree. I guessed the truth yesterday, so it's not really news. If I'm willing to take the risk of your loving me, are you ready to chance it, too?"

"I'd like to awfully. It would be lovely never to have to bother about anything any more. I'll marry you with pleasure if you really want me to, Stephen."

He could have laughed at the awful relief that surged over him. On the face of it, it was ridiculous that he, Barclay, who had been the acknowledged lover of half a dozen London beauties, and had had more *sub-rosa* love affairs than almost any man of his age in London, should feel the world swinging round him, because he was not entirely sure whether a little country girl would or would not marry him. And yet, he knew perfectly well that the kisses of all those other women who had gone

before, counted for nothing beside Joy's clear-eyed trust and her blind faith in him.

He pulled her to her feet with both hands, laughing a little unsteadily.

"Are you going to let me kiss you?"

"Of course." She lifted her lips frankly, her eyes fearless and unashamed, and suddenly he caught her, holding her fast, his lips buried in the dusky softness of her curly hair.

"You adorable baby. I'll be good to you, Joy. I swear I'll be good to you. I've been a rotter, but I'll try to play straight in future. Do you believe me?"

"Yes." She was a little breathless, herself, caught up in the tide of his own passion, and, confronted with something of whose existence she had hitherto been utterly unaware, she suddenly clung to him, her fingers locked behind his head.

"Oh, Stephen, I *do* love you. I'm so awfully glad I'm going to marry you."

Standing on the tips of her toes she reached his lips, laying her own against them, and in the first intoxicating glory of their cool, sweet fragrance, he registered a vow to play the game for the future and vindicate her faith and trust in him.

They were married by special licence that afternoon, since there was nothing to lose and everything to gain by wasting no time; and in the days that followed, Barclay found himself marvelling again and again at the unexpected depths of character he discovered under the childish exterior—the more amazing because she was so astonishingly innocent. Criminally innocent, he called it to himself, confronted with the questions she asked him.

The first week they spent shopping. The clothes that had suited little Joy Beresford were hopelessly inadequate and unsuitable for Mrs. Stephen Barclay, and, with unlimited money at their disposal, backed by Barclay's really excellent taste, it was only to be expected that the girl who appeared at Lancing's talked-of celebration, was a very different being from the weary, jaded little person who had staggered into the flat a week earlier. Even Barclay had to admit that her development approached the uncanny. It was almost impossible to believe that

Joy, faultlessly dressed, wearing the Barclay pearls, which were the envy of half the women in London, and the centre of a happy and always amused little circle of men and women too, could be the girl who had tramped through the rain in a fit of childish temper barely two months before. Barclay was happier in those early days of his marriage than he had ever been in his life, genuinely in love with his wife and more than content to see her success amongst his friends. He had had the sense to keep a tight hold on himself, and to realize that the tactics he could have followed with an older, more experienced woman, and which he had found so eminently satisfactory in the pursuit of all his numerous love affairs, would have terrified Joy, and in the frank, grateful affection which she gave him, he found no reason to complain of the lack of anything deeper or more subtle. He was absolutely content to wait until she woke, naturally, to the realization of the existence of something deeper than mere affection, certain of its inception sooner or later, and, in the meantime, they were amazingly happy.

If Joy knew any sorrow at all, during those first radiant weeks of her marriage, it was her inability to find the little spinster, in whose devoted care she had lived during the last nine years. Neither letters to Allestree to be forwarded nor application to the woman in whose house she had stayed at Hallingham found her. She might have vanished from the face of the earth. They could not know, of course, that on her return to Allestree, the day after her brother's funeral, the Professor's torrent of abuse and recriminations had sent her, white-faced and shivering, back to London with nothing really clear in her terrified mind but the knowledge of Joy's parentage, and the fact that the child she loved had been turned adrift. She did all she could, poor distracted woman. She wrote to Lady McInnis telling her all she knew, even went to Scotland Yard, though she felt like a convicted criminal all the time she was there, to implore help in finding Joy, but she never found her, and the only address Barclay could get was that of the warehouse, to which the few odds and ends of furniture, which had belonged to her brother, were sent to be stored.

Two days after her marriage Joy wrote to young Conway

—a rather incoherent letter which vaguely puzzled him. He read it in his mother's sanctum, where she sat doing accounts, and she watched him with a little puckered frown across her forehead. Peter meant so much to her, and the letter was so obviously in a woman's hand. When he had finished reading it she asked a question, which, to save her life, she could not have stifled

"A love-letter, Peter?"

He flushed.

"Good Lord, no! From a little kid I met. Jolly little girl she was too. Like a squirrel rather!"

"A—a lady, Peter?"

"Of course." His voice was a little indignant. "A toppin' kid."

She looked down at him sprawling on the rug before the fire, this big splendid young son who had come, like his only sister, so late in her married life, and when hope seemed so nearly dead.

"Were you in love with her, son of mine?"

The boy flung back his head.

"Oh, Lord, *no*! She's only a kid. A regular baby. I say, Mater, what are you *drivin'* at?"

"Nothing. And I'm an insufferable snob into the bargain, my son. But I shall be awfully thankful when you're safely married, my Peter."

"Married? Me? Why?"

"Your grandmother used to say that only sons were an awful responsibility, and she was perfectly right. Netta's a simple matter compared to you. I hope you'll marry young, Peter. The Heriots don't as a rule, but if you'll oblige me by making yourself an exception to the rule, I should be really very grateful. I'm getting ancient and I *would* like to see a heap of grandchildren running about Valley Royal before I die."

"*You* die?" Peter got up, kissed her lightly. "You're about fifteen, Mater, and you know it. It's immoral for a woman with a grown-up son and daughter to look your age. You're years younger than Netta or me. Both you and father are children compared to us."

"I wonder if you'll ever learn to venerate your mother, you graceless child. Next time you come home I shall wear a white wig and see what effect that has. Peter,"

she put out a hand, caught his strong brown fingers in hers. "You *will* do as I ask and marry young, won't you? Marry someone really nice?"

"Like Saisie Belhouse?" He grinned wickedly. Saisie Belhouse was the daughter of third-rate, excessively rich American parents, who made no secret of their ambitions with regard to Lord Heriot's son. "Would you really like Saisie for a daughter?"

He dodged when she tried to box his ears, but long after he had gone and she could see him, skates over his arm, making for the lake with Netta, she sat staring in front of her, looking into the future. Peter meant so much—his welfare and the honour of the name he bore so much more. Only sons *were* an awful responsibility.

She was still there when her husband came in from his morning ride over the estate.

"What's up? Accounts worryin' you, old lady? Lost tuppence, I'll bet."

He was a big, heavy man, straight as a die, despite his sixty-seven years, with his son's habit of clipping his "g's" and Peter's blue eyes. Throughout the thirty years of their married life, his wife's meticulously-kept household accounts had always been a source of amusement to him, the more so because he had never in his life known the lack of money or cared how much he spent.

She held up her lips for the kiss with which he never failed to greet her.

"I've been talking to Peter. I wish he'd get married, Bill. Safely, nicely married, I mean, to the right sort of girl. I've been having nightmares about him lately."

"A propos of what?"

"He had a letter from some girl or other this morning. And, although I tried to sound him, he wouldn't mention her name. Just said she was a nice little girl."

Lord Heriot stooped and kissed her again.

"You're a very charmin' woman, Diana, but as far as that young scamp's concerned you're like a bloomin' hen with one chicken, and that one an invalid in danger of immediate annihilation. Peter's no fool and he knows what's expected of him. A damn sight better than I did, if it comes to that, as you'll remember if you take the trouble to look back a bit. But he's his father's son and

he'll be all the better if he's left to work out his own salvation. The surest way to make any man keen on a girl is to put a barbed wire fence round her, and stick 'forbidden ground' in capitals all over her. Take my tip and leave him alone. Chances are he's never thought twice about the girl, not seriously at all events."

He was very nearly, if not altogether, correct in his supposition. Joy had struck young Conway as a nice kid and a lonely one to whom it lay in his power to be kind. He had certainly never regarded her from a sentimental standpoint, had never even thought of her from a marriageable point of view. It is doubtful whether he thought of her at all, save when he was actually in her company, or planning to take her out and bring a little brightness into what was obviously a deadly dull existence. But vaguely her marriage troubled him. He wondered what type of man this Barclay was and why Joy had never thought fit to mention him. He felt perfectly sure that she had had no intention of so hasty a marriage on their trip to Portsmouth; and, somehow, although he could not have explained why, had he been asked to do so, the idea of her married was oddly disquieting. He hoped she would be happy, but he realized that the marriage merely worried him because it was unusual for the girls he knew and met at Valley Royal, girls who were Netta's friends, to get married without the usual paraphernalia of invitations, wedding presents, and the usual fuss incumbent upon weddings generally. Vaguely he felt that Joy was too good for what he called, in his own mind, a hole-and-corner wedding, as he felt sure hers must have been; but in the gay festivities of a houseful of guests over Christmas, Joy and her wedding slipped into the background of his memory, and by the time he went back to his beloved ship, *en route* for China, he had almost, if not quite, forgotten her.

To Joy herself, revelling in Italy's blue skies and sun-kissed lakes, the months that immediately succeeded her marriage were ceaseless days of unfettered happiness. She was too young, and too unaccustomed to luxury and freedom, to indulge in the dangerous pastime of self-analysis or introspection. She was absolutely happy with Barclay, entirely contented with the place in which

her lot had been cast, and asked nothing better from life, as she knew it, than to be allowed to continue as she was. To Barclay, accustomed either to artistic artificiality or to crude animalism in the women he knew, her naïveté and freshness appealed to him, as nothing had ever done. Her childishness and frank interest in everything she saw and did, her amazement at the luxury and comfort with which he surrounded her, were a never-failing source of amusement to him. She was extraordinarily popular with his friends, at all events with those of his friends to whom he deemed it advisable and wise to introduce her, and she gloried in the possession of a cheque-book and a bank-book of her own, as another woman would have delighted in the Koh-i-Noor had it been unexpectedly laid at her feet.

Her only regret was that Miss Roberts could not share her happiness. She had really loved the little grey spinster, and it would have added the last stone to the wall of her satisfaction with life and the world, if, out of her own money and comfort, she could have lightened the financial burden on Robin's thin shoulders. But even the memory of Robin faded, like that of young Conway, into the limbo of forgotten things, before all the whirling gaieties of those early months of her married life, and in the warmth of Italian skies and the sunshine of Barclay's ever-deepening love for her, she developed in a manner which left even her husband rather bewildered and stunned, remembering what she had been so short a time before.

Only once had he caught a glimpse of the breathless little virago, who had first attracted his amused attention in the Allestree days, and that, thanks to Molly Fanshaw, a little sore at the loss of a favourite cavalier and not above getting a little of her own back when possible. To Mrs. Fanshaw's languid, rather tropical style of beauty, Joy, with her frank, unspoilt outlook, was a complete stranger, and one not very greatly to be feared as a rival. At least, that had been Molly Fanshaw's first opinion. She varied it slightly, when Joy discovered her endeavouring to lead Barclay backwards along the primrose pathway of their old intimacy. Not even Barclay was prepared for the storm of contempt and scorn with which Joy confronted little Mrs. Fanshaw's efforts at recapturing

him. To do him justice, he didn't care a row of pins whether he ever saw Molly Fanshaw again or not, but he would not have been the man he was, with the heritage he had, had he not met advances like Mrs. Fanshaw's slightly more than half-way, and that despite his very real love for his wife. To Barclay's mind, women were placed in the world for the express reason of being made love to by men, and he saw no reason to alter his opinion. He could discover no harm in sitting in dusky corners with a pretty woman, and would have seen no harm in Joy doing it also, with any of her masculine friends, had she evinced any desire to do so. But Joy was made of different material. Below her childishness she was pure, primitive woman, and she had no intention whatever, of sitting silently by like a suffering martyr, and seeing her man usurped by any other woman, however beautiful. White-faced and furiously angry she told Mrs. Fanshaw, in no uncertain manner, exactly what she thought of women who played fast and loose with other women's husbands; and, having reduced that little lady to stupefied silence, not unmixed with a kind of furtive admiration, she waited until Barclay came back from shutting the door on Molly Fanshaw's exit, and then told him, without any mincing of words, exactly what she thought of him, too. The fact that he laughed at her maddened her, and it was a furious little shrew—half crazy with jealousy—who finally sobbed away her fury in the shelter of his arms.

The episode amused him even while it threw sidelights on Joy's character of which he had hitherto been in ignorance. It took him a long time to realize that nothing but ungovernable jealousy had prompted her outburst, but it also showed him a side of her nature that rather startled him, brought up as he had been to regard polygamy as one of the minor peccadilloes of a man's life. Her utter innocence and ignorance of the lives men lived before marriage, and often after it, flabbergasted him, but it made him doubly careful to whom he introduced her, and, because of the undeniable honour and loyalty which exists among thieves, none of the men or women with whom Joy came into contact during those first months of her married life, thought for an instant of telling this wide-eyed child the type of life her handsome husband

had led prior to her arrival on the scene, and which, they cheerfully predicted among themselves, he would lead again as soon as the novelty of his marriage had worn off.

This was the state of things that existed, then, when, wearying of Italy and its sunshine, they drifted to Paris, and there ran up against Toinette Doreau.

CHAPTER X

WHO, or what, Toinette had been prior to the day when a tricky fate blew her into Paul Devlin's studio, looking for a job and any sort of trouble that came handiest, no one either knew or cared. Partly, because he wanted a model for his Salon picture; partly, because it was pouring with rain and he was bored; and partly, because he was smarting to show Suzanne Délisier that there were as good fish in the sea as ever came out of it, he kept her; and the ménage lasted for three days short of seven weeks, during which time the picture was finished, and the occupants of near-by studios reduced to the verge of insanity by a series of storms unequalled in the vicinity. Ultimately, when the neighbours were arriving at the decision that either Devlin or Toinette, or both, must go, Toinette took the law in her own hands by attaching herself to a red-headed Irishman, named Murphy, who did not want her, but for whom she had conceived a passionate attachment. She succeeded in inspiring in him a picture which was the talk of Paris the following year, and then departed again in search of other fish to fry. Two years after her meteoric appearance in Devlin's studio, and ten months before his marriage to Joy Beresford, the devil, in a freakish mood, sent her to Barclay. He was playing at being a painter then, installed in a studio furnished like a Turkish harem, and with a reputation for folly, only equalled by his complete and utter recklessness.

Toinette liked him, his money, and his casual devil-may-care ways. Still more, she liked his spotless cleanliness, and the shaving soap he used. She announced her intention of taking up her abode permanently under his protection, did so, in fact, a week later, and, because

he was always on the look-out for new sensations, and entirely regardless of what people said, or thought, about him, he let her stay. For eight months they lived a cat and dog life, slightly worse than that which Devlin had lived with her two years before, but yet withal the horror, a life the memory of which set Barclay's pulses hammering even yet.

With the face of a Botticelli Madonna, she had the morals of a gutter rat, the vocabulary of a fishwife and, in the opinion of those most likely to know such intimate details, the most beautiful body in Paris. In addition she was as temperamental and uncertain as a streak of lightning, and about as reliable. By the time Barclay got tired of her, and turned her out with a substantial cheque by way of softening the blow, she was making a very comfortable living by posing during the day and by singing and dancing at night in one of the best-patronized cabaret shows in Paris. She had a little throaty, soprano voice, a fund of unmentionable gutter slang, and a knowledge of men and their needs, which was positively uncanny. When she left Barclay she took an *appartement* of her own, and, in between her sundry violent *affaires* with his successors, who were legion, she lived there in comfort, if not in actual luxury.

Barclay thought he had almost forgotten her, when he came back to Paris eight months later with his wife. Almost, but not quite. Toinette had a knack of leaving an impression on men's minds, which took longer than eight months, or even eight years, to eradicate, and there was still the trace of her henna-tipped fingers on his soul when, leaving Joy safely in charge of some friends in the hotel, he wandered down to the studio three days after their arrival. Toinette hadn't been the only episode in six years, of course, but she'd lasted longer than any of the others, and she'd been too vivid, and too startling, to be cast into oblivion as easily and carelessly as her sisters in weakness.

He'd written to the concierge of the building, telling her to have the place opened and aired, and he grinned happily to himself as he went up the familiar stairs. Looking back, happy as he knew he was in his married life, he couldn't, for the life of him, altogether suppress the

sigh of regret that it was all over. Every corner of the old grey staircase had its memories. There, on that step, he'd first seen Desirée with her tawny hair ablaze in a dying sunset, and her green eyes glinting with wickedness. He'd taken her back to dinner he remembered—a pleasant little dinner it had been, worth remembering. Behind the door on the right had lived Suzette, who danced her way, on the tips of her tiny silver-shod toes, into men's hearts and brains every night at the Folies. She'd married, he recollected, a fat, greasy Jew, who'd loaded her with diamonds and shut her out of the sight of men, away in a dull little village, miles from civilization and the lights of a crowded, shouting auditorium. A good sort, little Suzette. Straight too. Straight as a die, for all her dainty loveliness and her lack of either parents or relations, as far as she could remember them. He grinned reminiscently, remembering how he'd learnt the truth of Suzette's boasted rectitude.

Every step had its memories—every corner. The studio was thick with them, palpitating with kisses that could never fade, days and nights that could never altogether die, when he left the staircase and went into it. Over the back of a chair hung the very scarf Toinette had worn the last time she posed for him—a flimsy bit of red chiffon. It had been rather wonderful against Toinette's dead white skin and blue-black hair—wonderful hair the colour of black velvet until the sun caught the indigo-blue note amongst the black, and painted into it the shimmering beauty of a raven's wing. Funny what a lot of memories that bit of chiffon brought back. Things he'd got to forget, of course, now that he was a married man, but still——

He was still remembering them, for the last time, when he heard a sound behind him and swung round. There, in the doorway, where he had first seen her, the sun on her hair, her vivid lips just parted to show the whiteness of her little even teeth, and all the temptations of the devil written in blazing capitals all over her, stood Toinette herself.

"Good God!" He stood quite still, the scarf in his hands. "What on earth's brought *you*?"

She saw the scarf and with her devilish intuition she

read the memories that had been racing through his mind. She came in very slowly and, watching her, the thought came back to him as it had always done when he saw her move, that she didn't seem to walk as much as to float. It wasn't because she was little either—she must have been every inch of five feet eight. It was something in the way she carried herself, the swing of her beautiful shoulders and the way she put down her ridiculous, high-heeled shoes. Whatever it was, it was still there. The room began to swing a little round his head. He wished desperately that she'd stay where she was. There was something devilish about her—the hold she got on you—and there was Joy. He'd got to put an end to this before it started. He kept on repeating to himself, "She's got to go. She's got to go," like an automaton, but he couldn't get it out aloud, and every minute she was coming nearer with that same Madonna-like smile parting her lips and in her eyes the temptations he dreaded.

The next moment, without a word from her, she was in his arms, her red lips clinging to his, her white arms wound round his neck and the reflection of an imitation, non-existent soul in her sloe-black eyes.

An hour later he came back to earth with a thud.

"I say, Toinette, I've got something to tell you. This sort of thing's got to stop, you know. I'm married."

She looked round at him, tranquilly, patting her hair in front of the big, gilt-framed mirror.

"So? Married, hein?" She spoke in the same little throaty voice with which she sang. "How foolish to get married, Ste-fien. An' how mooch more foolish to t'ink dat it mak' any difference to *us.*"

"But, good Lord, Toinette, it's got to. Look here, you don't understand." Desperately he fought for loyalty to Joy. "All this is over and done with. I'm—damn it all—I'm fond of my wife. I may not be a model of all the virtues but I'm not altogether a sweep. Clear out, there's a good girl. Don't think I don't appreciate it all. You were damned good to me once, but after all married men aren't as free as single ones, are they?"

"An' suppose I not go? Suppose I not *wish* to go?" Her voice hardened a little.

"You've got to. I'm taking no chances. I never meant to see you again. I don't know how you found out I was back even, but you can't come again. Look here, Toinette, I don't want to be brutal and all that, but you surely must see that things have altered a bit."

"W'at is she like—your wife?" She looked at him out of narrowed, watchful eyes.

"Young and little, very young. That's one of the reasons why I can't let you come here. She'd never understand. She's been brought up differently and she'd be frightfully upset. I don't pretend that I wouldn't like to see you now and then. You're devilishly attractive—prettier than ever, I think—but it's no good. I'm not having my wife upset by hearing things about me. See?"

She nodded slowly, her lips a straight, thin line across her white face.

"M'm. I see. Eet ees all—w'at you call—wash out? I am forgot? So?"

"Damn it all, Toinette, it was over ages ago before I left Paris. You know that as well as I do."

"I t'ink you come back one day. I wait for you—al-ways for you. Zose ozzers, zey are nobodies." She clicked her finger and thumb contemptuously. "Zey just pass away ze time. But you. I love you. An' I wait. Al-ways I wait."

"What on earth for?" He felt horribly uncomfortable—an utter brute. Vituperation he was prepared for, was accustomed to from her, but not this plaintive little wail of desertion and patient waiting. "You knew I shouldn't marry *you*."

Better be brutal, he decided, and get it over. Lord, what dangerous things women were! Who would have thought of Toinette taking up a line like this? Besides, he'd never given her the ghost of a chance of thinking him in love with her—seriously, that is. The ménage they'd run was the ordinary, everyday ménage of any Quartier Latin student. But none of them ever thought of legalizing those care-free, casual month-in, month-out unions by marriage. You might as well think of harnessing an unbroken Arab to a plough and expecting it to walk demurely along the furrows. He had a sudden vision of himself and Toinette in Grey Towers, waited on

by the excellent Yardley or the still more stolid Johnson. Pictured Yardley's pained stare of amazement when Toinette suddenly lost her temper, as she did on an average five times a day, and hurled the first thing that came handy straight at his head. He would have laughed had he been out of sight of Toinette's face with its down-drooping mouth and its pitiful eyes, into which in some devilish way of her own she managed to instil the expression of a soul which she certainly did not possess. A soul was an unnecessary adjunct, according to Toinette's theory, apt to give trouble, and she had no time for troublesome adjuncts.

He gave a sigh of relief when she got up. Thank God, there hadn't been a scene. He'd got out of the way of scenes these days. He was glad he'd remembered his cheque-book, too. A nice little present would help to ease the parting for her, anyway. Funny that he'd never thought of her as really caring for him, but it only showed you how careful you'd got to be dealing with women. You never knew when they'd go splashing wildly off the deep end.

"Yes. Zat I knew. I will go." She smiled at him through vivid, parted lips, a pathetic, horribly tragic little smile. "You will for-give me becos I mistake an' wait for you, Ste-fien. An' come to see you?"

"Oh, I say, Toinette, don't make me out an utter blackguard. I'm jolly glad you came." He went over to the writing-table, scribbled something on a slip of blue and pink paper, blotted it and gave it to her. "Take this, there's a dear girl, and buy something to remember me by. We've had lots of good times together, haven't we?"

She tucked the cheque into her purse, reached up and kissed him, sadly, gently, and went out without a word—floating—as she had entered.

With the door shut behind her he mopped the perspiration from his forehead—laughed when he saw that his hand was shaking and then drew a sigh of real relief.

"Thank Heaven, *that's* over," he said with devout gratitude. "God, what a tricky bit of mechanism a woman is!"

CHAPTER XI

HAD he been less smugly satisfied with life and less in love with Joy he might have pondered a little more thoughtfully upon the method of Toinette's madness. But beyond admitting his amazed relief that she'd neither sworn at him nor cursed him as only she *could* curse nor screamed vituperation at him at the top of her voice, accompanying it with whatever came first to her hands in the way of china or brass, he banished the whole thing from his mind and gave himself up to showing Paris to an utterly amazed and bewildered Joy.

They had been there nearly a month when the Devil, who invariably took a close personal interest in Barclay's doings, put it into the hearts of a trio of men going, bachelor fashion, to the Easter Races at Auteuil, to get him to make the party into a quartette. He left Joy lying down with a headache, perfectly content that he should go, and quite ready to put in an afternoon with a pile of new books which he had just bought her. It was not until the rain cleared off to give place to pale yellow-golden sunshine that the Devil, not altogether content with what he had already done and still on the look-out for something with which to amuse himself, whispered to Joy that an excellent way of spending the afternoon would be to explore Barclay's studio on her own. Her headache was better and she'd the rest of the day on her hands. A picnic tea, alone in the much-talked-of and never-seen studio, would make a thoroughly enjoyable way of passing the time till Barclay came home, and she could bring back some of the cushions he'd said were there, and a few of the bits of china and glass that he had expressed the wish to take back to England with them.

She sent for a taxi and was in the studio in less than a quarter of an hour, let in by the grey-haired old hag of a concierge who tried, without succeeding, to gauge her social status. She spent a glorious two hours, poking round amongst Barclay's treasures, made tea on the little electric stove and was nearly ready to go home, when, without troubling to knock or to wait for permission to enter, a woman pushed open the door and floated

slowly and gracefully, like a bit of gossamer on a summer breeze, over the rugs on the polished floor and across to where Joy stood gazing at her.

"You ze new wife?" Toinette spoke softly, slowly. A more experienced woman than Joy would have recognized the claws below the soft velvet pad enfolding them. "Ste-ffen Barclay's new wife, hein?"

Joy threw up her head. She had acquired poise during the last five months and a certain amount of self-possession in addition to the quaint little air of dignity which had always been hers.

"What d'you mean by 'new' wife?"

Toinette laughed.

"You not know of *me*? He—Ste-ffen—not tell you of ze ozzer wife? Me, *par exemple*?"

The tapestry-hung walls of the studio, its stacked canvases, the model stand with its heap of multi-coloured draperies, the Venus de Milo in the far corner began to dance and sway dizzily round Joy's little curl-crowned head. Through the haze of the swinging tapestries she heard Toinette's voice, devoid of all its soft silkiness, shrill and vituperative. In front of her a cheque signed in Barclay's heavy, sprawling hand, dated three weeks earlier, blazed at her out of the mist, alongside another official-looking document that said something about marriage and registrar, and above and through it all rang the things which Toinette, very crude, very French, crazy with jealousy, was saying in unutterable, unrepeatable gutter-slang about Stephen, her husband.

With the cheque staring her in the face it never entered into her head to doubt the other woman's story or to look very closely into the document which Toinette flourished beside the cheque. Utterly unscrupulous, pure, primitive cave-woman, fighting with any and every weapon she could grab, Toinette stopped at nothing. Her quick, sloe-black eyes sized up her squirming little victim with unerring accuracy. She didn't care a hang for the truth or for possible results. All she wanted was to get even with this wide-eyed slip of babyhood, who had a legal right to the name she coveted and a legal claim on the man she loved, and she didn't care how she did it. Mercifully, Joy's French was of the schoolroom order, supplemented

by the little she had picked up during her wanderings. Most of the epithets with which Toinette decorated and embellished her faltering English passed unheeded, but the facts remained, clear, decisive, unbelievable, had it not been for the damning evidence of that pink and blue slip of paper which bore Stephen's signature.

Joy didn't know that sheer, devilish revenge lay behind the things the French girl was saying. She didn't know that unlegalized unions are as common amongst the students in Paris and anywhere else as apples on an apple-tree. She didn't know that Toinette had stored up the cheque, uncashed, for the very purpose for which she now used it, and had watched the studio every day for three weeks in the hope of catching Stephen's wife unawares and alone, and she didn't know that Toinette's statement of her marriage to Stephen fifteen months before was a bit of clever and undiluted lying, backed by a forged certificate purloined from a friend. But she did know—or at least in her agony of mind she thought she knew—that this woman had a prior claim, that here, before her, was Stephen's lawful wife and that she herself was neither fish, fowl nor good red herring.

She stumbled out of the studio into the street, leaving Toinette still screaming her foul, unmentionable abuse, found a taxi somehow and got back to the hotel.

When Barclay came back from the races and went to find her, the first sight that met his eye on opening the door was a room that looked as though a cyclone had struck it and, stuck in the mirror over the mantelpiece, a card which bore the bald statement, "I have seen that woman and I have gone. I am never coming back—Joy."

CHAPTER XII

THE Calais express, with Joy in it, left the Gare du Nord ten minutes before Barclay, completely dazed by the shock of his discovery, dashed into the station. By the time he had the garage unlocked and his own car on the road she had nearly an hour's start of him, and he had three hours and a half to catch the English boat by which he took it for granted that

she had gone. It did not need very much imagination to fill in the very sketchy outline which Joy had given him of her reason for flight. No one knew better than he the lengths to which Toinette could go if she really meant mischief, and he could guess pretty well the sort of things she had said.

He never doubted his inability to find her and persuade her into coming back with him. She was too ignorant of her way about to be able to elude him very long, and he guessed that she would go straight to the hotel where they had stayed together, for the very good reason that she knew no other.

When he missed the boat by three-quarters of an hour, he wired to the hotel in London and to the police at Dover to keep track of her without frightening her, and then sat down to await, with what patience he could muster, the sailing of the morning boat next day. Not until she had gone did he realize to what an extent she had filled his life during the past months, or what life meant without her. The night he spent wandering up and down his uncomfortable bedroom at Calais was the most thoroughly wretched he ever remembered to have spent in his life, and he was thankful when morning came and he could start on the second phase of his journey.

He got his first jar when he reached Dover and the police told him that no one answering either to his description or to the name of Barclay had travelled on the boat or disembarked at Dover. The passengers had been carefully checked as they came down the gangway, the purser of the boat questioned, and the inspector was perfectly and very regretfully certain that no one who could possibly be Mrs. Stephen Barclay had crossed by the boat in question.

From Dover, utterly sick at heart and a good deal more frightened than he cared to admit, Barclay dashed to London in a hired car and to the hotel where he and Joy had spent the latter part of their honeymoon. The urbane and smiling manager remembered Mrs. Barclay perfectly, regretted that he could not assure Mr. Barclay of her safety under his hospitable roof just then. As far as he knew Mrs. Barclay had not been to the hotel at all since her departure to Italy with her husband. Careful

inquiries amongst the staff corroborated his statement and Barclay, more puzzled than ever, and, by this time, hideously frightened, went, as a last hope, to the little bachelor flat which had been shut up ever since their marriage. There was just a chance—the vaguest chance. But the flat was still shut up and Joy was not there, had not been there at all. Both Yardley and the Commissionaire were absolutely certain as to that. Finally, he went to Scotland Yard, gave them all the details he thought necessary, together with a photograph of Joy, taken in Paris a fortnight before, and went back to the flat to wait. There was nothing else to do. From the bottom of his heart he cursed Toinette and her tongue—cursed the day he had ever seen her and the evil fate that had taken him to the studio at all. Cursed everything and everybody steadily for three days and three miserable, sleepless nights and finally, in despair, went back to Paris to see whether, after all, she had guessed what he would be most likely to do and was hiding there.

As a matter of fact Joy had made no plans at all when she bolted to the Gare du Nord and took her ticket for the first place she could think of. Her one idea just then was to put as great a distance as possible between herself and Barclay, and never to see him again. Never for a moment, even when she came to think things over more quietly, did she doubt the truth of Toinette's lying statement, and despite the fact that Barclay had told her a good deal of the truths about life and men, she had never connected any of the things he told her with himself and his own life. It never entered into her head to think that the man she had married, and who seemed to her the personification of all that was splendid and chivalrous, could descend to the sort of things of which Toinette had spoken and to which even he himself had referred in connection with the lives of other men. Whatever had been her actual feelings for him, whether or not she felt for him the white-hot flame of passion which she had inspired in him, she had certainly put him on a pedestal, and half the horror which Toinette had roused in her had been due to the knowledge that her idol had not only feet, but the greater part of his body as well, made of the commonest of clay.

Not until she was actually in the express did she realize that beyond Calais she had made no plans of any kind or description. Neither did she fully realize until then that for the past five months she had been living in the closest intimacy of marriage with a man to whom she was not legally married at all. She had had no time to think of anything very clearly in her desperate haste to get away from Barclay and to make it impossible for him to find her. But as the train raced Calais-wards, it did strike her that Calais and the English boat would be the first places where he would expect to find her.

The five months of her life with him had given her both self-possession and a certain scanty knowledge of the world and its ways. The girl who sat alone in the Calais express, running frantically away from her husband, was a very different girl from the trustful-eyed child who had started on her hunt for Robin a few months earlier. She still looked ridiculously young, but she had acquired an odd little air of gravity and importance that gave her the appearance of being older than she was, and she might easily have passed for twenty instead of seventeen as she sat in the corner of the empty carriage huddled in her heavy furs, desperately trying to think out the next move in the game.

From a dingy bedroom in a second-rate hotel where the waiters were greasy and the proprietor leered at her in a way that terrified her, she watched the English boat slip out of the harbour and stagger across the tossing black water. From the same window she saw Barclay's great blue car race through the streets to the quay and return ten minutes later to the bigger hotel across the way, where she knew he would expect her to stay. Still watching, she saw him go to the quay the following morning, and not until she had satisfied herself that he had sailed did she creep out of her hiding-place and take the first train down to Boulogne. From there the boat to Folkestone was a simple matter. Once in the maze of London there was only a thousand-to-one chance of their meeting, if she avoided the places which she knew that he most frequented. It says a good deal for her newly-acquired knowledge that she took a taxi to a hotel and booked a room for herself without showing any of the trepidation

which she felt, and her self-confidence grew by leaps and bounds when she saw that no one looked at her in surprise at seeing her alone or even took the trouble to notice her at all.

By the time she had dined alone in her own room she had her plans cut and dried. Money was no object and caused her no worry. She had learnt its value easily enough during her life with Barclay, and learnt, too, that for a woman she was very comfortably provided for. Early next morning she was up and about. It was a comparatively easy matter now for her to go from place to place and to make her own arrangements. An interview with an exceedingly affable gentleman at the Bank mentioned in her pass-book, resulted in a considerable addition in cash to the money she had brought with her, and from there she went to the shipping offices in Bishopsgate whose address she had seen in that morning's *Times*. She knew exactly what she was going to do, and it was with something of her old spirit of adventure creeping again to the surface that she made up her mind to the next step.

When she went back to the waiting taxi she had booked a passage for Fijama in the name of Miss Beresford on the boat which sailed the following day, and her wedding-ring lay in a scrap of tissue paper thrust into the inside pocket of her purse.

CHAPTER XIII

IF Joy had ever felt any doubt as to the wisdom of the course she had taken in going out to her aunt or as to the welcome she would find on her arrival, unexpected as she was at Government House, it died before the flood of dazed relief in little Lady McInnis' eyes when, after all the months of frightened anticipation of what might be the next news of her adored sister's child, she came in from an official reception one blazing May afternoon and found Joy waiting for her in the shadowed coolness of the big-jalousied drawing-room.

The torrent of questions that rushed to her lips she stifled in her thankful gratitude at finding the girl safe after the months of anxiety. Norah McInnis had never

worn her heart on her sleeve, and no one but her husband knew the agony of mind which she had suffered when Miss Roberts' letter had reached her with the news of the Professor's action and Joy's disappearance. Everything that could be done to find her had been done. Sir Gerald had spared neither pains nor money in the prosecution of inquiries, but it seemed to them both that the child must have vanished from the face of the earth, so disheartening had been the reports of the detectives whom they set on her track. Neither of them had dared to voice even to each other the hideous fear they had both known on receipt of that letter. It was impossible to tell what the effect of the Professor's news might have on a girl of seventeen, shielded as Joy had been from every vestige of contact with the seamy side of life, and, like Miss Roberts, they overlooked the fact that the very completeness of her ignorance saved her from the shame and degradation she might otherwise have felt.

During the fourteen days of her trip out, Joy had decided on the story she meant to tell, had repeated it so often to herself in the loneliness of her little cabin, that by the time the ship dropped anchor off the Palisadoes at Queenstown she had almost made herself believe that she was speaking the truth. Of Barclay she made no mention whatever. The voyage out had given her time to think, and the shame and ignominy that had passed unheeded over her head at the Professor's denunciation of her, rushed over her in a blinding, overwhelming flood when she remembered those five months during which she had lived, as his wife, with the husband of another woman. The Joy Beresford who stood watching her trunks passed through the customs sheds, who ordered a car to take her to Government House and met Lady McInnis when she came back from her reception, with steady, expressionless eyes, was a woman of the world, not a girl of seventeen at all. She had aged ten years in those days alone with her thoughts and memories. Disillusionment, the collapse of her idol from its pedestal, the hideous shame of the past five months, had all left their mark. She might in time forget as completely as she tried to make believe that she had forgotten, but she would never again be the girl who, with the stars in her eyes and adven-

ture in her soul, had gone to explore Barclay's studio and had found, instead, a Bluebeard's Chamber of Horrors.

She took to the happy-go-lucky, thoughtless life of the tropics, as a duck takes to water. No one, in the weeks that followed her arrival in the gay little capital, least of all little Norah McInnis, with her butterfly outlook on life, had an inkling of the sleepless nights when Joy lay tossing on her bed, remembering the things she would have gladly sacrificed her soul to forget, and yet the memory of which brought such bitter-sweet pain. In those hot breathless tropical nights, while thousands of invisible insects formed a wonder-laden orchestra of their own and the fireflies danced in the heavy-scented air, she went back over every detail of the treasure-trove of those forbidden months of her life with Barclay, treasuring them all the more, because she knew that they were forbidden fruit and that she could never take anyone into her confidence.

An older, wiser woman than Joy would have realized the danger of secrecy and the possible rocks ahead, would have known, too, that whatever she had done had been done in complete good faith, and that she herself was blameless in the tragedy of the awakening that followed it—would have, at least, made a confidante of someone who could have helped her to unravel the tangle of her marriage, and to make the best of the years ahead.

But in the first dazing hours of recognition of her position, Joy, with the arrogance and reckless independence of youth, laid her plans, and she stuck like a limpet to a rock to the scheme of life she had drawn out for herself.

She made not the slightest attempt to verify the truth of Toinette's story. Her meeting with the French girl had been her first introduction to the existence of such women, and it never struck her that any woman would be wilfully and brutally cruel enough to ruin the life of a fellow-creature from motives of bitter, raging jealousy. To a woman versed in the world's seamy side, proof would have been the first thought. To Joy came no thought at all but horror, shame and blind, unreasoning disgust, that any man, least of all Stephen, into whose keeping she had so gladly and willingly given her youth and her life, with unshakable faith in his honour and his chivalry, could

have been guilty of so despicable a crime against unsullied, unquestioning girlhood.

But if she lay awake at nights, she flung herself feverishly into the gaieties of life during the day, and no one guessed the presence of the grisly skeleton that walked step for step by her side, when she danced and played tennis and was the life and soul of every picnic and bathing-party which came her way.

She had been in Fijama two months when the skeleton, tired of merely keeping in step at her side, decided that the time had come to be taken more notice of, and jolted her arm. She ignored him the first time, turned her back, refusing resolutely to be frightened, and flung herself more feverishly than ever into the gaieties that went on round about her. Even Lady McInnis, who lived for pleasure and enjoyment, failed to keep up with her desperate quest for excitement during these breathless days of a tropical August, but nothing seemed to tire Joy, although the colour faded from her cheeks and black shadows thickened and darkened under eyes that were insensibly growing too hard and old for the eyes of bare eighteen.

"Slack off a bit, Joy." Sir Gerald looked at her over the breakfast cups, one more than usually steamy morning. "You can't possibly keep this up. You're looking a perfect wreck. What time did you get home last night?"

"I've forgotten. Not very late, Uncle Gerry. And I'm perfectly all right. If you ask Major Eveleigh, he'll tell you that I only danced half the evening, and came home quite early. Consie got quite crotchety because I wouldn't stop."

"Consie's lived out here all her life and doesn't feel the heat," McInnis said drily. "You're new to it, and I won't have you crocking up. I'm sending you and Norah up to the hills on Monday, until the hot weather's over. You can dance there, if there's anyone to dance with—both of you—to your heart's content."

Norah McInnis, coming across the veranda, caught the fag-end of his sentence, kissed him lightly before she took her coffee from Joy.

"Where are we going to dance, Gerry dear?"

"In Mayagonga. Look at Joy's eyes. They're like coal-holes. On Monday, my dear, you and Joy and

Eveleigh—or Thompson, whichever you like. But Mayagonga it is, and you can argue till your hair drops out before I change my mind. So you can just as well pack up and look pleasant over it."

No one knew better than his wife when and when not to argue with His Excellency the Governor of Fijama, and she packed without a word of protest. She, too, had noticed the shadows under Joy's eyes, and she vaguely hoped that, in the restful peace of the hills, she would be able to pierce a little further through the apparently impenetrable fence of reserve, which Cynthia's daughter built up under her gay exterior, between herself and anyone who tried to get too near to her.

They went up by car on Monday, as McInnis had arranged, in charge of Eveleigh, the Governor's junior A.D.C., a man of thirty-two or three, with a plain, kindly face and the eyes of a faithful dog. He and Joy had been friends from the day of her arrival, and if he fondly hoped that the frank comradeship she gave him might one day ripen into something deeper and warmer, he never, by word or deed, showed it. It had been at Joy's request, made specially to the Governor, that he and not Thompson, the senior of the two A.D.C.'s, went up with them to the bungalow at Mayagonga, and the thermometer of his hopes rose a degree higher when he sat between her and Lady McInnis in the back seat of the big car that bore them out of the dust-laden streets of the city and up the twisting, climbing roads that led to beautiful Mayagonga.

He and she stood together for a moment on the veranda that night, before Joy followed Lady McInnis to bed, smoking their final cigarettes. It was still early—barely ten o'clock—but not a light showed in the sleeping village below, and only the monotonous thrumming of a drum in the distance broke the silence. In front of them the lights of the Southern Cross twinkled and glistened in a black velvet sky, and above them a white moon, almost at the full, flooded the whole countryside with a blaze of silver glory.

"It's a wonderful bit of the world, don't you think?" Eveleigh flicked off the ash of his cigarette, scattering it in a shower of tiny crimson sparks. "A night like this takes a lot of beating."

For a moment Joy said nothing, then the low intensity of her voice startled him.

"It isn't the moon or the stars that make the world a wonderful place, Major Eveleigh," she said bitterly. "It's the people in it, who make the difference. A deluge of rain and a howling gale in a house with the roof off, with the people one cares for, are better than all the glory of a night like this, and loneliness. At least, that's my opinion. I'll be ready at seven for our ride. Good-night."

She went through the little black and white hall to her room, with weary, dragging steps, unconscious of Eveleigh's vaguely-troubled eyes, and she was just ready for bed, when the skeleton jolted her arm for the second time.

CHAPTER XIV

WHEN the jolting of her arm became unbearable, she persuaded Eveleigh to drive her to Queenstown for the day, on the pretence of seeing the dentist. He took her readily enough, only too glad to be asked, gave her lunch under the palms and gay, striped awnings of the Cotton Tree Hotel, and finally dropped her at the address of the dentist she gave him.

She stood on the doorstep watching him as he turned the car to go back to the Cotton Tree to wait for her, and something in the strained over-brightness of her smile vaguely worried him. In the merciless glare of the afternoon sun, framed against the background of the white sandstone steps on which she stood, it struck him that she looked horribly ill. Neither long nights, nor the peace and restfulness of the green hillsides of Mayagonga, had taken the shadows from her eyes, and there were hollows in her cheeks that even he, inexperienced as he was in the ways of women, knew had no right to be in the cheeks of a girl of eighteen. He knew that she was miserably unhappy, despite her feverish quest of excitement, and her quick, gay, rather breathless little laugh. With eyes sharpened by a steadily-growing love for her, he heard the hollow ring underlying the gaiety and realized, as perhaps

no one else realized, that fear of her own company and her own thoughts led her to seek relief amongst the thoughtless, care-free boys and girls with whom she came into daily contact.

He ran the car under the shade of the trees behind the big, white building, went through the black and white foyer with its fictitious air of coolness, limping a little as he went. The glare of the sun which had shown up Joy's haggard cheeks with such cruelly unerring fingers told on him a little, too, as he passed out of the foyer into the beautifully-kept grounds behind. He looked older than his thirty-two years, and the incessant grinding pain in his leg from which he had never been entirely free since the day a bit of German high explosive found its home there, had drawn lines of pain across his face that time would never rub out.

The Cotton Tree Hotel in Queenstown is one of the places that represent as nearly as possible, off the stage, the transformation scenes of the old pantomime days. On one side it looks on to a dismal, dingy street, where dirty little stores range themselves alongside dirtier native shacks, and clanging electric cars, loaded and packed to suffocation, shriek and bang their way to the eastern end of the town with noisy irregularity.

On the other side it faces cool, green gardens, and a sapphire sea that glimmers and sparkles in the sun. Tall palms lift graceful heads heavenwards, swaying and waving in the breeze that is the one regular feature of an island crammed to overflowing with irregularities. It starts at ten every morning, and stops at four every afternoon, with the precision of an electrically-driven machine, and is the one saving grace of a city that has little or nothing else to recommend it. Without their daily doctor, as the breeze is called, to clear the air, the people of Queenstown would have no alternative but to lie down and die, choked by the dust and germs and general slovenliness, which the City Commissioners are too busy over their personal quarrels to notice, or too careless to trouble about. But there is neither dust nor grime in the gardens of the Cotton Tree. Side by side, with the palms, great groups of crimson kannas and multi-coloured crotons add their touch to the general colour scheme, flanked by blazing poinsettias and

the dainty, dancing hibiscus, that is like no other flower in the world, helped again by the climbing roses and clinging coralita vine that covers every available space of building with its sticky leaves and its pink clusters of tiny, crumpled blossoms.

You can find all the flowers of the island at the Cotton Tree, at any time of the year almost. There are no leafless autumn months in Fijama. No dismal days when the wind wails through stripped, naked branches and the rain drips with steady, maddening persistence on gravel and roof and window-pane. When it does rain in Fijama, it rains with a thoroughness that calls for admiration, rather than fretfulness, and it is usually so badly needed that it is welcomed, with open arms as it were, and the heartfelt satisfaction that there is no longer the fear of having to share your morning bath with another member of the family, because the tank is down to the last inch.

The breeze was still blowing when Eveleigh reached the little landing stage, and stood looking out over the dancing, restless water. Half a mile away, between the town and the Palisadoes, a long, grey cruiser, awnings up, swung lazily with the tide, the white ensign of the British Navy fluttering at her stern, the outline of her guns, grim and threatening, against the sleepy peacefulness around her. Closer inshore a wrecking steamer creaked as she wrenched at her cables, and here and there, half a dozen schooners, sails furled, swayed and rocked as the cleansing wind raced past them shorewards. Behind him, two men discussed the possibilities of a hurricane. Obviously, they depended on bananas for their daily bread and butter, and had suffered before. A little further away a pretty dark-eyed, dusky-haired girl, who knew how to use her eyes to the best advantage, was having tea with a young subaltern of the white regiment, stationed at Upavon Camp. A cynical little smile spoilt the gentleness of Eveleigh's mouth for a moment, as he heard them booking dances for that evening, the boy's fair head and the girl's dark one close together over the slip of pasteboard. The absence of the colour bar is one of the irregularities for which Fijama is famous. At the Cotton Tree on a gala night, you can see everyone, who is anyone, and many of those who are no one at all, decked out in all the gay splendour of beautiful gowns and

glittering jewels, and with eyes dusky, beckoning, bright as the stars that flicker over their heads, or languorous as the purple-black shadows over the silent, brooding sea, holding out their subtle invitation for all those who are ready and willing to read it. Money is the only key needed to open the gate of that sacred portal, which shelters the charmed circle of social life, and golden-brown complexions pass unchallenged, provided they carry with them the little gold latchkey of wealth. It staggers you a bit at first, especially if you're accustomed to America or the East, to find that the man who has been told off to take you in to dinner at a white man's perfectly-appointed home, has an obvious bluish tinge round his faultlessly-manicured nails, and a kink that no amount of labour with a wet hair-brush will altogether remove from his sleek dark hair. It is a fairly large pill to swallow, when the daintiest slip of humanity it is possible to think of, with hair as golden as corn in September, and a skin of combined rose-leaves and cream, brings in her train as chaperon to a dance, a mother whose complexion is a great deal nearer brown than yellow, and whose accent has the unmistakable chi-chi twang of the native half-breed. And it goes against the grain sometimes, too, to see a white woman, of gentle birth and unimpeachable credentials, in the arms of a Government Official, whose high rank precludes her refusal of his requests for dances, and yet who is very nearly, if not quite, as black as her own butler.

Eveleigh had been three and a half years in Fijama, but he never saw a white woman talking, as to an equal, with a native, or an Englishman dancing with a girl of obviously native extraction, without the same little cynical smile with which he listened now to the girl and boy behind him booking dances together. He came of an old and fast disappearing family, where honour and chivalry counted for more than money, and he could never accustom himself to the sight of brown and white together without a shudder of sick disgust and repulsion.

He waited an hour before he saw Joy coming across the lawn and got up to meet her. Her eyes, encircled by their heavy shadows, were brighter than he had ever seen them, her red lips set into a smile that hurt him to watch, but her shoulders, under the soft muslin and lace of her

frock, had a little defiant swing, and her voice, when she greeted him, was utterly free of care.

"Is that our tea? You're really rather a marvel, Nigel. I don't wonder Uncle Gerry won't hear of letting you go home. How *did* you manage to order tea at the very identical moment when I turned up so that I shouldn't have to wait a second?"

"Tooth stopped?" Eveleigh pulled up a chair for her, sat down opposite, watching her fingers as they fussed amongst the tea cups. He thought she had the smallest hands of any woman he knew.

"Tooth?" She looked up, puzzled. "What—Oh, *that*. It was hardly worth bothering about as it happened, but it made an excuse for a day out. Shocked, Nigel?"

He answered lightly, but he had seen the colour flame into Joy's throat and cheeks as she realized her slip, and he knew that she lied to him.

"I should be a fool to be shocked at any excuse that gives me a whole day of you, shouldn't I? You're eating nothing, Joy. Try these cakes. They're really quite decent."

He was talking for the sake of talking, giving her a chance to pull herself together. At the base of her throat he could see a little pulse hammering madly, and the fitful colour that came and went in her cheeks under the brim of her shady hat worried him more than he cared to own. He knew enough of her to realize that something really serious prompted Joy to lie. However thoughtless and careless and reckless she was, she never lied. "It's too much trouble to remember what you've said," she had told him once when they discussed a woman who was notoriously untruthful. "I couldn't be bothered to lie about little things, Nigel. Honestly I couldn't."

The inference was obvious. She had lied, and she had lied because she was in a corner, and only a lie could get her out of it.

"I wish we could stay on and dine here. Would Norah have a fit, d'you think?" From the day of her arrival she had definitely refused to address her youthful little aunt by her prefix. "There's a heavenly moon, and if we started at nine, directly after dinner, we could be in Mayagonga by eleven. Clothes don't matter, because it's the off-

season, and there won't be a soul to see us. Do stay, Nigel. Or are you shocked again?"

"I'm wondering if Lady McInnis would mind your staying?"

"With you? My dear Nigel, she thinks you're a paragon of all the virtues. You can't do anything wrong in Norah's eyes. Besides, we can telephone her if it comes to that. They'll take about four hours to get through on this rotten system, but I believe it's worth it. Be a dear and tell the boy to put a call through for you. Unless you don't want to stay, of course."

"Don't be silly, Joy. You know perfectly well that there's nothing I'd like better."

He beckoned a watchful negro boy, gave him the message for the telephone operator and leant back in his chair, watching her out of puzzled eyes. She had pulled herself together now, got a firm grip on herself and was absolutely at her ease. Only the strained brightness of her eyes and the little pulse hammering ceaselessly in her throat, gave the lie to her forced composure, and for the first time he knew real anxiety.

It didn't take quite four hours to get the call through to Mayagonga, but it was well after six before they got Lady McInnis' permission to stay on for dinner and motor up later. Joy herself answered the phone, with Eveleigh at her elbow.

"May we, Norah? There isn't a soul to see us or gossip. The place is as empty as a drum, and I'd love the drive up in the moonlight. . . . You're a dear. . . . Yes, not a minute later than eleven. Barring trouble, of course. Nigel says he's had two new covers fitted, so *that's* all right. . . . Yes, thank you, quite all right. . . . Hardy said there was only the tiniest hole. . . . All right. Don't wait up if you're tired or bored, darling. I'll come in and say good-night as soon as I get home. Nigel sends his love. . . . No, darling, he says he doesn't. He'd forgotten you were the Governor's wife . . . His respects. All right. Au'voir."

She rang off, slipped her hand through his arm, but the unhappiness in his mind was steadily growing.

She had lied to him, and she had lied to Lady McInnis. A silly little footling lie that need never have been told. And why?

CHAPTER XV

THERE is no time when Fijama is as beautiful as on a moonlit night, when the country lies bathed in silver glory, and all the sordid hovels and corners are purged and cleansed by its purity. And there is no bit of all Fijama's beauty that is more wonderful than the road that leads from Queenstown on the coast to Mayagonga, perched high on its mountain top, forty miles inland, once the long dusty road out of the city is left behind, and there is nothing around you for miles but open country and God's own fresh air.

Even Joy stopped her feverish chatter as the car slowed up over the bridge that crosses the Gonga river and crept its cautious way round the tortuous curves of the overhanging precipice on their right. Three feet below the level of the winding road, on their left, the river gurgled and sang its peaceful way seawards, kissing its banks daintily as it slipped past, a silver streak between the heavy trees and rocks, whose reflection it flung back gaily to the skies above it. Ahead of them the Gonga Mountains lifted sombre, brooding heads through the silver haze, the topmost peak almost invisible, veiled in mist like the soft grey chiffon of a scarf flung lightly over a beautiful body. Here and there the light of a native hut winked at them from the shadows, a frog croaked huskily in the water table, or a startled owl screeched as it fluttered across their path. They met no one on the road as they crept inland and upward, save one car, just as they left the road beside the river and began the steep climb up the mountain side, crammed to overflowing with a laughing, noisy crowd of boys and girls, and they were both rather silent when at last they saw the lights of Mayagonga twinkling at them through the trees on the distant hillside.

"Drive straight round to the garage, Nigel. I'll go too, and we can walk back. It's a heavenly night and you were a dear to take me and give me such a good time."

He took her at her word, ran the car round past the front of the darkened veranda, to the garage three hundred yards behind. From the window of Lady McInnis' room the soft glow of a pinkly-shaded lamp shone out on to the

smooth green of the turf, and on the netted veranda a table covered with a white cloth held sandwiches, a crystal jug of lime squash in a silver ice-bucket, hot coffee, smoking and fragrant, bubbling softly in a beaten copper pot over a tiny copper spirit-stove.

They locked the garage door, came back hand in hand as children might over the soft turf, still rather silent under the magic glory of that floating silver moon.

"Hungry, Nigel?" It was Joy who broke the silence at last. "Isn't it just like Norah to leave us such a topping supper?" She leant over the table, sniffing at the dishes. "Shrimp in that one. Chicken and ham over there by your elbow and cucumber here. Coffee? Or lime squash? There's whisky, too, over there on that other table."

"Coffee, I think. Aren't you ever tired, Joy? You're like a will-o'-the-wisp the way you keep on the go."

"You can always imagine you're tired if you stop to think long enough about it, my dear. I'm sorry if I fidget you. You're finding me a bit of a handful, aren't you, Nigel?"

He took the coffee she poured out for him without answering, stirred it thoughtfully and sipped it. Then put the cup back on the table and got up.

"It's not quite eleven. We got up in good time. Come for a stroll to the gate and back before you turn in."

She looked at him sharply through narrowing, watchful eyes.

"Now? It's you who are restless this time. Haven't you had enough for one day?"

"Will you come?"

She shrugged her shoulders.

"If you want me to, of course."

He held open the netted door for her, followed her out and stood for a second holding a lighted match to her cigarette. Then he took her hand and pulled her arm through his.

"Are you cold? You're shivering."

"Rubbish." She laughed, but the laugh rang hollow and he knew it. "It's the aftermath of your driving, my dear. The way you wriggle round corners makes my flesh creep with horror. What's made you, of all people, who so dearly love your bed, want to indulge in midnight perambulations?"

"I want to talk to you, and what I'm going to say comes easier out of doors. I'm not much of an orator at the best of times, as you know. The only thing you can always be sure of is that I mean every word I say."

"I know that. Go on."

"We've been pretty good friends these last three months, haven't we? I mean, we've hit it off pretty well. You know more or less what I am and what I'm capable of. I shall never be much good physically and I shall always limp. More, the doctors say, as I get older."

"Oh, Nigel, *please*. What *does* that matter?"

"Girls think a lot of a fellow's personal appearance," Eveleigh went on stolidly. He took no notice of her interruption; might never have heard it, and was talking in a level expressionless voice, with his eyes on the distant white gate. "After all, it's only natural that they should. No woman wants to be seen dragging a cripple about after her, and I'll be more or less of one if I live till I'm fifty. At least, that's what the doctors say. As it is, my temper's rocky. I get damnably irritable if the pain gets worse than usual. Unbearable almost." He stopped to light a second cigarette from the stump of the one he had finished. "As against that, I've got a clear thousand a year of my own, and I'll have more later. I shan't ever inherit the title, because I've three brothers older than I am and they're all married. Two of them have sons. That's the balance sheet, Joy, my dear."

"I don't know why you're telling me all this."

He hesitated, blew a couple of smoke rings into the heavy air with careful deliberation, threw away the cigarette, then stopped in front of her and put both his hands on her shoulders.

"I think you do, Joy. You must have seen it coming. I've been in love with you ever since you came. Do you think the sheet balances well enough for you to consider marrying me?"

For a breathless moment she stared at him, fascinated, as a fly stares back at the lizard who, in a second of time, will snap it up with his little darting tongue. Then, to his blank amazement, she began to laugh, softly at first, then more loudly, helplessly, and hysterically, her shoulders shaking under his hands and the tears running down her

cheeks. Once, she tried to stop and speak to him, but the laughter broke out again, wild and horrible, uncontrollable, devoid of every atom of mirth, and at last he tightened his grip on her shoulders and shook her sharply.

"Stop it, Joy. D'you hear? What's the matter with you? Stop it, I tell you."

She dried her eyes and looked at him, struggling desperately for self-control, and when she still didn't speak he shook her again.

"I can't see that there's anything laughable about it, Joy. You may think it's funny, but I'm damned if I can see what's amusing you."

She caught her breath, still staring at him with those over-bright, fascinated eyes, and then suddenly she shook herself free of his detaining hands and began to walk back to the darkened house, talking over her shoulder in a voice from which every scrap of youth had fled.

"Forgive me, Nigel. You couldn't know, of course. I don't know why I laughed in that ridiculous way, because I never felt less like laughing or more like crying in my life. It's dear of you to want to marry me, and I appreciate it most awfully. You're by far the nicest person I've met out here, and the only one I'd think of marrying. But I can't marry you, my dear. I can't marry anyone."

He caught her up, limping, his hand on her arm.

"If you think that of me, *why* can't you marry me? Is there any reason why you shouldn't?"

She turned suddenly and smiled at him, the saddest little smile he thought he had ever seen.

"The best of all reasons, Nigel, my dear. I can't marry you, because for five months before I came out here, I was living with a man who'd already got a wife, and to-day I've learnt that I'm going to have a baby in December. It's quite a good reason, isn't it?"

CHAPTER XVI

LOOKING back afterwards, Joy always knew that one of the worst of all the horrors that crowded thick and fast about her head in the early days of the confirmation of her fears had been the breaking of the

news to Norah McInnis. To the end of her life the scene would be blazoned on her memory, hideous and unforgettable, horrible, the more so, because from start to finish her aunt uttered not one word of blame or of reproach. Years afterwards she had only to shut her eyes and the whole thing came back. The sunny, jalousied room. Little Lady McInnis propped against her belaced, befrilled pillows, her pretty hair tucked under the frilly boudoir cap that matched her flimsy wrapper. A grey parrot with a villainous tongue and a jeering diabolical chuckle, perched at the foot of her bed, cursed everybody who came into the room in a steady flow of lower-deck jargon, and two paroquets chattered and screeched ceaselessly at each other on the edge of the open window. She could see herself too, her back to the dainty little figure in the big four-poster bed, a slip of a girl in a blue linen frock, her eyes hard and bright, her voice perfectly steady and devoid of all expression.

"I am ready to do exactly what you think best, Norah. At first I meant to go away without telling you. To slip out of things altogether. It seemed so much the best way out of the muddle. Then, afterwards, I thought you had had enough anxiety about me already. I've tried to think of ways and means until my head is swimming. I realize, of course, that, with Uncle Gerry's position to think of, I can't stay here."

"Where else will you go?"

Joy shrugged her shoulders wearily.

"What does it matter? Anywhere? Mercifully I can pay my own way. There isn't money to consider. But I do realize that I've got to leave here."

Lady McInnis sat very still for a moment. Then she spoke guardedly.

"The Professor told you about your mother, didn't he, Joy?"

"About her going away? Yes."

"Did he tell you where she is living?"

The girl looked up sharply.

"*Is* living? He said she was dead. At least, he implied that she was dead. D'you mean that she's alive. My mother *alive*, Norah?"

"Steady, Joy dear." Lady McInnis caught the hysteri-

cal note in the child's voice. "I should have told you before, but you've always sheered off the subject when I've tried to get near it. I thought it was a sore subject which you would rather avoid. My dear, *indeed*, I thought you knew."

"Where *is* she?"

"My Cayabana, two hundred miles from here. Joy, darling, do you mean that you didn't *know* your mother was alive?"

"Do you think I'd have been here if I'd known I had a mother living? Oh, forgive me, Norah. That is horrid, though I don't mean it to be. But I've wanted her so horribly. I've never even seen her, and all my life I've longed for a mother like other children. How can I get to her?"

"There's a steamer which goes once a week. I wonder——"

"When?"

"On Thursdays. Joy, you can't go off at a tangent like this. We've got to wait and think things over. Decide what is the best thing for you to do. I've got to see Gerry. Besides, I must know more. Who is this man? This Barclay? He's got to be found—punished. Men can't do things like that—ruin children of your age and go scot free. Where is he?"

"What does it matter? Punishing him won't prevent me from having a baby."

"Were you married in church?"

"Oh, yes. In St. Stephen's, Victoria. It was quite above board and respectable, Norah. At least, it seemed so to me. He'd been extraordinarily kind to me. Bigamy was the last thing I thought of."

"Who told you of his first marriage?"

"I saw his wife." She shrugged her shoulders again wearily. "What's the good of it all, Norah? There's no possible doubt about it. She told me, and I saw the cheque he'd given her a month before. She showed me the certificate, too. They were married in Paris a year before I met him. Isn't that enough?"

"He might have divorced her."

"And still be seeing her and giving her money? It's no good, Norah. The argument's too strong. I'm one

of the Also-Rans, and what's the use of trying to blind oneself to facts? There's nothing to do but to make the best of it, and pray that the baby may die. It's funny that mother and I both made such a hash of our lives, isn't it? I wonder if she'll understand. And aren't *you* going to preach to me, Norah?"

"Oh, my dear, don't be bitter. What's the good of preaching as you call it? It wasn't your fault that a blackguard tricked you into marrying him, and you're not the first girl who has suffered for her love and her faith and her innocence. The thing's happened, and all there is to do now is to make the best of it and to make things as easy for you as we can."

"You're much more charitable than most people. The average woman would have turned me out without waiting for explanations. All the same, I'd rather go to mother, Norah, if you'll tell me how to get there. It isn't every girl who lives for eighteen years in ignorance of her mother's existence. It's only natural I should want to see her."

"I'm going to send for her here."

"*Here?* What will Uncle Gerry say?"

"He can say what he likes. For once I'm going my own way. I've done as he wished for eighteen years and part of this is my fault. I blame myself horribly. Now I'm going to do what I ought to have done at the beginning. She's coming here, and you're going to stay until she comes. Then we can decide what is best."

"Uncle Gerry will be furious. After all, there's his position, Norah. You can't jeopardize that."

"I'm jeopardizing nothing, my dear. And it's time I paid for what I've done, anyhow. I ought never to have listened to your mother when she made me promise not to be the one to tell you that she was alive. She wanted you to think her dead, and treasure her memory. Not to think of her as a social outcast. I swore to her the night she sailed for Cayabana that I would never tell you. She never thought of the Professor telling you, of course. And since you've been here I've always pictured you as knowing that she was alive and feeling ashamed of her. I couldn't bear to speak of it and see you *look* ashamed of my little sister, Joy. So I said nothing. I was wrong, of course. But I can make up for it now. I'm going back to Queens-

town to-day to see Gerry and then to cable your mother. When she comes we can decide what is best to be done, but until then the least I can do is to keep you safely here. Don't cry, Joy. It wasn't your fault, darling. It's just bad luck. Hideously bad luck. But it might have been worse. You've all of us to help you, and to stand by you, and surely that ought to count for something."

She never told Joy or anyone of the interview she had with Sir Gerald behind the closed doors of his office five hours later. For the first time in the seventeen years of her married life, she defied him openly and definitely.

"Either you let Cynthia come here, or I shall go to her, Gerry. Indefinitely. That is final. I have done a criminal thing all these years in keeping the truth from Joy, and I refuse to send her off in the condition she's in now, alone. It's no use arguing with me, I've made up my mind. I fully realize my duty to you, but I realize, too, that I owe my sister and her child something, and I will *never* let Joy, as she is now, go off to Cayabana alone."

He knew her well enough to be quite certain that, for all her gay lightheartedness, she meant every word she said, and he knew, too, that he could bear most things better than the indefinite separation she threatened, and was quite capable of putting into practice. He gave in at last, as she knew that he would, and she sent the cable herself, writing it out with fingers that shook a little under their glittering load of diamonds.

"You'll be nice to her, Gerry? To Cynthia? She's such a dear, and she's my only sister."

"Good God, Norah, don't make me out that type of prig. Surely you've sense enough to realize that it's my position here I'm thinking of. That it's always been my position. A fellow in my job's got to be above suspicion, just as his wife must be above suspicion, in a country like this. If *we* don't set a decent moral example, who in God's name will? Surely you realize that."

"No one will know. Why should they?"

"Skeletons have a damnable trick of breaking open the locks of their cupboards, and stalking about naked in broad daylight. At least, that's been my experience. Are you going back to-night?"

"I can't leave Joy alone at Mayagonga with Major Eve-

leigh very well, can I? That'd be opening the doors of the cupboards without waiting for the skeletons to break the locks. Come with me, Gerry."

"I can't."

"Why?"

"When I think of that child I see red. A kid of her age. *Your* niece. God, it's horrible!"

"It wasn't her fault, Gerry. And she's enough to bear without her own people letting her down. She's unhappy enough, heaven knows. Won't you come?"

"No." He turned away irritably, saw her eyes heavy with tears, and swore softly under his breath. "Oh, all *right*. I'll come. Only for God's *sake* don't cry, Norrie. I'll do any damned thing sooner than make you wretched, and you know it. Women are a set of damned hypocrites, all the lot of them."

His voice was gritty with irritation, but his eyes as he stooped to kiss her were very kind and gentle under their heavy brows.

CHAPTER XVII

AN hour before the lights of the returning car glimmered on the hillside below sleeping Mayagonga, Eveleigh sent a message to Joy, dining alone in her own room.

She looked at the scribbled note, wrote a refusal, and then changed her mind.

"Tell Major Eveleigh I'll be on the veranda in ten minutes."

He was waiting for her, standing in the shadows, when she came, shifting restlessly from one foot to the other.

"I'm here, Nigel."

He pulled up a chair, still in the shadows.

"Have you had dinner?"

"Yes."

"Why did you leave me to dine alone." He saw her hands tighten on the arms of her chair. "I'm waiting to know, Joy."

"It never struck you that I might not feel particularly

proud of what I've made of my life? Don't you give me credit for any shame at all, Nigel?"

"There's no shame attached to what you've done. The man was a blackguard and a swine. It wasn't your fault."

"Is that why you sent for me? I could have told *you* that. It's been the theme of every thought I've had, for the last four months. There's nothing you can say about him, that I haven't said already, Nigel."

"Were you in love with him?"

"I don't know about being in love. I'm not sure what love really is. I certainly thought him the most wonderful being in the world. If that constitutes love—well, I suppose, I *was* in love with him."

"Do you love him still?"

"I'd kill him if I could. There's nothing I can think of, that's bad enough. I loathe him, and I loathe and despise myself. I can't tell you, how I hate and despise myself, Nigel."

"You haven't forgotten what I told you last night, have you?"

She laughed mirthlessly.

"One doesn't forget an oasis in a desert when one's dying of thirst, my dear Nigel."

He lit another cigarette, very deliberately and carefully.

"Have one?"

She helped herself from the case he held out.

"Thanks. Light it for me, Nigel. My nerves are jangling till I can't hold a match. I've wasted a boxful to-day."

"You're smoking too much. How many cigarettes do you get through in a day?"

"Twenty, perhaps. Sometimes less. I don't think I ever smoke more than that."

"I'd divide that amount by half if I were you." He spoke levelly, unemotionally. "Twenty a day's too many for a girl of your age. Is that going?"

She nodded, leant back in her chair, watching him curiously. He was still in the shadows where she could only see the outline of his face, and the crimson tip of his cigarette.

"What's at the back of your mind, Nigel? You didn't

send for me to preach to me about cigarette-smoking, did you ? "

" I didn't send for you to preach to you at all. Preaching isn't in my line as you know well enough. I want to ask you something."

" I'm listening, my dear."

" I'm still waiting for the answer to the question I asked you last night."

" What question ? "

" If you'll look back a little you'll remember that I asked you to marry me. I believe I told you that I was in love with you, didn't I ? "

" Are you trying to torture me, Nigel ? "

" I'm not a brute, my dear."

" I gave you your answer."

" That wasn't an answer to my question. The statement of facts you gave me had nothing to do with my question, or with my love for you."

He saw her stiffen in her chair, lean forward a little, peering at him through the shadows.

" Have you gone perfectly crazy-mad, Nigel ? "

" If it's crazy-madness to love you—yes."

" I don't think you understand, even now, what I've really done."

" I understand perfectly what's happened, which is all that matters. And I know that you weren't to blame. The fact that a blackguard let you down, doesn't alter my love for you."

" Dear Nigel, I'm going to have a baby."

" So you told me last night. All the more reason for marrying me."

" What ? "

" It's clear, isn't it ? " He spoke in the patient tone in which one endeavours to explain intricate mathematical problems to a particularly dense child. " Last night I asked you to marry me, and by way of answer you made a series of utterly irrelevant statements. To-night, I ask you again. Will you marry me, Joy ? "

" You're quite mad, Nigel."

" I was never nearer sanity in my life. Will you ? "

" No."

" Why ? "

"I'm not altogether a rotter, my dear, and I hope that I've still got a few rags of decency left, even now. If I were to take advantage of your offer I'd be ashamed to look you in the face for the rest of my life. I don't know anyone in the world who'd have ever thought of anything so splendid, but I won't marry you, Nigel. I wouldn't marry you as things are, even if I loved you. Still less, when I haven't even that excuse."

"I'd teach you to love me."

"I'm not going to give you the chance. My dear, it isn't that I'm ungrateful. It isn't that I underrate what you're willing to do. It's the finest, most splendid thing any man could do, but I'm not going to allow you to do it. If you'll stay my friend—my very dearest of friends, Nigel—well and good. It can't be anything else, ever."

"Is that final?"

"Absolutely. I've made my bed and I'm not going to hunt about for a more comfy one, made by some one else, to lie on. That's the action of a cuckoo. I *am* grateful. I'm so grateful, that I want to cry at the bare thought of what you've offered, and you hate women who cry, don't you? Almost as much as you hate them when they laugh for nothing. Go on being my friend, Nigel. I shall be the richest woman in the world, in spite of everything, if I can count your friendship amongst my possessions."

"If you change your mind, the offer'll always be open, Joy."

"My dear, I shan't change. Although I shan't forget, either." She got up, straight and slim in her black dinner gown and suddenly stood on tiptoe and kissed him. "That's for gratitude, Nigel. It's the best I can do, and a poor best, I'm afraid. I wish I could prove it a little better."

"You can make use of me when you want me," Eveleigh said easily. "It's all the proof I want, my dear. And there's the car. Let's go to the gate and meet it, shall we?"

CHAPTER XVIII

HALLIDAY brought Cynthia over from Cayabana himself, much against his will, in the motor launch which he used for business trips amongst the islands near his home. Only because he had never refused any request of importance which she had made to him, in all the eighteen years since he had taken her from the bleak misery of the Ivy House to the warmth and sunny luxury of his own home, surrounding her with the love for which her hungry little soul had shrivelled and starved, did he pocket his resentment and come now to Fijama on receipt of Norah McInnis' cable. He could never altogether overlook the fact, that for eighteen years Gerald McInnis had forbidden his wife and her sister to meet. Had definitely laid down the law in such a manner, as to tie even Norah's hands, in spite of the fact that, for ten out of those eighteen, they had lived within twenty-four hours' reach of each other, seven of them at Huyoman, only a hundred and fifty miles distant, before the Home Authorities had transferred McInnis from the Colonial Secretaryship there, to the Governorship of sunny Fijama. He had been willing and ready enough to efface himself all those years. He asked nothing at McInnis' hands for himself, but he bitterly resented his ostracism of Cynthia, who, as every one who knew her understood, had been far more deeply sinned against than sinning. His own outlook on life was that of absolute independence of other people's criticisms, and he had never been able to understand a man whose horizon had been bounded to the exclusion of even his wife's sister, the tragedy of whose life he realized, by the confining limits of public opinion and official red tape. It had been useless for Cynthia to protest, albeit with truth, that she asked for nothing but himself and his love, and that she was more than content to live the life he gave her. The knowledge that her sister's husband refused to recognize or receive the woman for whom he would willingly have given his life, or to allow his wife to visit her lest his social and diplomatic prestige might suffer, had been a pill he had never been able to swallow, and only Cynthia's earnest request, and the passionate longing to see the child,

which was his and hers, brought him now, at Norah's call, over the two hundred miles of sunny blue water that separated Cayabana from Fijama.

Norah McInnis herself met them at Queenstown, her husband behind her. It was characteristic of Gerald McInnis that what he undertook to do at all he did with a meticulous thoroughness that left no loophole for criticism, and he put both his feelings and his fears into his pocket, when he shook hands with the little sister-in-law he had never seen, and the big broad-shouldered man who followed her across the gangway of the gaily-awninged launch.

It wasn't an easy meeting for any of the four. Even Norah McInnis' light chatter failed under the strain of hiding from her sister the shock of the news waiting for her at Mayagonga, and to Halliday, resentful and watchful as he was for the barest hint of patronage, either from McInnis or his little butterfly wife, the whole journey came as something which, but for the child at the other end, he could very well have done without altogether.

He and McInnis sat in front of the car which McInnis drove himself up to the bungalow in the hills, both rather silent, both more or less embarrassed. Behind them, hand in hand, Norah and Cynthia the outcast, talked ceaselessly, the constant, " have you forgotten ? " and " do you remember ? " of their conversation, hitting both the men in front like accurately-flung pebbles. Not until he saw the light in his wife's eyes did McInnis realize, perhaps, what her loyalty to him had cost her. He had met and married her a month after Cynthia had shaken the dust of the Professor's house from her feet for the last time and had gone with Halliday to that corner of Wales where the child who was his daughter had been born. Without being either a prig or even narrow-minded he had a very great idea of the social prestige due to a man occupying his position, and it did not seem to him that *his* wife and the unmarried wife of a planter, however wealthy and however closely related, could have anything in common. The line he had laid down as to their association was the only one of importance Norah McInnis had never overstepped. Again and again she had tried to cross it, to persuade her husband at least to let her go to see the twin sister who had been so much to her in their girlhood days together, but

McInnis had been rigid in his ruling, and she knew quite well the effort it cost him now to sink both personal feelings and fear of scandal, and receive under his roof a woman who, for love of the man beside him, thought honour and discretion and the world well lost.

What passed in the shaded chintz-hung drawing-room when Halliday and Cynthia went in alone to where Joy waited for them, no one ever knew. Only Joy's cry reached Gerald McInnis and his wife as the door opened and shut behind her unknown father and mother, and then they crept away in silence, face to face with something that brought tears to Norah's eyes and a lump even to McInnis' throat, born of the wondering gladness of that welcoming cry.

"Does she know?" McInnis touched his wife's arm.

"Yes. I told her. It was better she should know at once. Gerry, she *is* a dear, isn't she? You must admit that she's not what you thought she was?"

He stooped, picked her up bodily in his arms and kissed her.

"You've got your answer in the fact that she's your twin, my dear. Isn't that enough even for you? I'm sorry for that fellow Barclay if Halliday once finds him. He's got a chin that means trouble for somebody."

They heard the drawing-room door open while they talked and Halliday's step in the little black and white hall, crisp, definite, the unmistakable step of a man who knows perfectly well the exact space of ground on which the next foot will rest.

"Can I use your telephone, McInnis? Joy tells me you're connected with the town. I want the shipping offices." He stood by while McInnis gave in the number to the sleepy, casual girl at the village exchange. "I'm grateful, very grateful, for your kindness to Joy. We both are. I'm sailing for England by the first boat I can catch, but Cynthia will take her over to Cayabana during the next few days if you'll put her up for so long. The sooner Joy gets home the better for us all. Herself included."

"You're going home?" McInnis asked the question for the sake of filling in a gap which he could see no other way of stopping. Halliday's eyes held a dangerous light and his chin was tilted to a dogged angle of determination. Faced with her father he recognized the origin of Joy's stubborn little chin and jaw.

"To find that fellow and learn the truth, yes. If ever a man felt the instincts of murder, I felt them just now, when Cynthia and that baby—my daughter, by God—told me what's happened. Until I've found him I shan't know a moment's peace."

"I think you're right. We've said very little to Joy herself. Thought it kinder to leave things to you and her mother, knowing you were coming, you understand. But it seems to me from what I can gather—she's rather incoherent, of course—that he wasn't by any means a wrong 'un. He appears to have treated her well enough. I'm wondering if there's a mistake—a misunderstanding somewhere. If you hadn't been coming I'd have instituted inquiries myself, but, as it was, I thought you'd do it better than I. I can't think that a fellow of Barclay's type—the man comes of decent stock even if they are a bit wild—would intentionally and deliberately *marry* a girl of Joy's age with a wife already living. It wasn't for her money. I've looked up her pass-book, and he never let her touch a penny of it from the day they were married. In addition he's made her a thundering good allowance. There was a cheque paid in to her account for five hundred the day after they were married, and another three months later, and she's hardly spent any of it, bar her expenses getting here and her clothes since she came. I'm pretty certain things aren't as black as they look, though I've deliberately refrained from rubbing salt on an open wound by too many questions. The child's got enough to bear. Good Lord, when I think of what she's been through these months, nursing that horror alone, it makes me wonder her brain's stood it out. She must have suffered tortures."

Halliday nodded, lifted the telephone receiver off the hook as the bell whirred noisily through the hall. Five minutes later he had booked his passage to sail for England on the *Miramar*, leaving the following evening.

CHAPTER XIX

HE went to the address of the flat Joy had given him first of all, only to find the place shut up and the commissionaire in total ignorance of Barclay's whereabouts. Yardley, summoned from invisible

regions, could give no information beyond the fact that, some time in May, Barclay had arrived, looking horribly ill and worried, and stayed one night and left, with the vague intimation that he was going abroad. From the flat, he went to Grey Towers with the same result. Johnson, startled out of his usual stolidity by the appearance of this sunburnt giant who demanded his master's whereabouts, knew less. Hadn't seen Barclay since he left to go shooting in Scotland ten months before and had, from what Halliday could gather, no great hopes of ever seeing him again, since Barclay's opinion of Grey Towers had been expressed in no uncertain terms.

The studio he found in the possession of a slender, æsthetic youngster wearing a purple and gold painting-smock, who invited him in, introduced him to a flippant little French girl with more physical charms than clothes, and could tell him nothing he wanted to know, beyond the fact that the studio had certainly belonged to Barclay, but that it had been advertised for rent, furnished, and that he'd taken it just as it stood, lock, stock, and barrel. Halliday listened, frowning. This was where Joy had first seen the clay feet of her idol. It wasn't difficult to reconstruct the scene either, faced with the boy in the ridiculous purple and gold travesty of working garb, the indifferent canvases scattered round the room, the girl with the scanty costume sprawling on the black satin-covered divan, dimpled chin cupped in dimpled hands, green eyes glinting, wicked and mischievous, under red-gold curls. Désirée, smoking her interminable scented cigarettes, could have thrown a stray sidelight or two on the man he was looking for had she wished to. But, just now, Désirée was playing the ingenue, and it didn't suit her book to say exactly what she knew of 'M'sieur Barclay,' who had, after all, only taken what she was more than willing to give him.

Halliday made a note of the name and address of the agent to whom the boy in the purple smock paid the rent of the studio, refused drinks or even the coffee which Désirée put aside her cigarette to offer him, and started again on his search. The agent's contribution was an address in Spain, from which he had received instructions from Barclay to sublet the studio; and of a dancer known as Toinette no one knew anything. Stray inquiries led

him to Devlin, who was perfectly honest in his statement that, *grâce-à-Dieu*, he did *not* know the whereabouts of Toinette and, moreover, never wanted to know them again. And then, when everything seemed to be hopeless and the hunt entirely useless, he went back to London, and in the club of which he was still a member, though he hadn't crossed its doorsteps for seventeen years, he saw a letter addressed to "Stephen Barclay, Esq." stuck in the rack by the big swinging doors.

The porter, who was naturally a stranger and did not know him, answered his questions warily. Mr. Barclay was undoubtedly a member of the club. He used the club when he was in town, which was not very often. He had, however, been there three days earlier and was expected back during the week. If the gentleman would leave a message——

The gentleman hung up his hat and coat in the hall and sat down to wait—one eye on the letter in the rack. He waited for five days, during which he never left the arm-chair in the hall, except for meals, which he bolted in a fashion that shocked and scandalized the waiters who served him, and on the evening of the sixth, out of a fog the consistency of pea-soup, the doors swung open to admit a man with a white, haggard face who might have been any age from thirty to fifty, and who gave the impression to the man watching him that, for all he cared, the world might end there and then without causing him any undue sorrow.

Halliday's heart missed a beat, but something of the blind hatred he had been nursing and fostering against the man whom Joy had married, died before the haggard misery of Barclay's eyes. He waited while the younger man read his letter and handed his soaking ulster to the waiting porter. Then he got up and touched Barclay on the shoulder.

"Isn't your name Barclay? Stephen Barclay?"

"Yes." Barclay's voice was heavy and dull. "Did you want me?"

"I'm Halliday. John Halliday—if the name conveys anything to you. It may or may not. What probably will is the knowledge that I'm Joy's father. What the hell have you got to say for yourself?"

The light that blazed into the other man's leaden eyes

startled him. It was like a beacon set in a pitch black night, and he very nearly cried aloud with pain as Barclay's fingers, like the iron teeth of a trap, closed round his arm.

"God in Heaven," he almost sobbed. "You've found her? Then if you've any pity at all, tell me where you've got her."

CHAPTER XX

CONFRONTED with Barclay's livid face and listening to the incoherent jumble of words which, tumbling one over the other, made up the gist of his story, it was impossible to doubt the truth of his statement. His very looks were a witness of the agony of mind he had suffered during the months when he had hunted Joy from one end of England to the other and, following vague clues, practically all over the Continent as well. If Halliday had not suffered himself too much and too deeply, remembering Joy's shame and misery, to be able to see the light side of anything just then, he could almost have laughed outright at the picture Barclay drew of his interview with Toinette, six days after Joy's disappearance. One of the reasons for Barclay's popularity in his bygone student days had been his ability to tell a story well; and, miserable, utterly wretched as he was, it came as second nature to him to make of that scene with the girl who had done her best to wreck his life and Joy's, a picture that literally bubbled and throbbed with life. Halliday had never been the type of man to whom indiscriminate love affairs had appealed. He had spent practically the whole of his life in the West Indies, first as his father's right hand, latterly as the sole owner of the huge property he had inherited. A long line of hard-working Scotch ancestors had bequeathed to him a conscience that prohibited indulgence in the pastimes with which most of his friends and acquaintances passed their time, and when Fate blew little Cynthia Beresford across his path, he was grateful for the puritanical ancestors who had made it possible to give to her a love that was absolutely heart-whole and unharmed by the predatory fingers of other women.

But for all his rigid upbringing he was essentially a

broad-minded man, and he knew quite well that the things which held no interest at all for him were all that made life worth living to men of a different type, and because he understood so well, he could, and did, sympathize thoroughly with the hash Barclay had made of his life.

Relief had been his first sensation while he listened to the stumbling history of pitfalls which had culminated in Joy's dash for liberty and safety. Bearing in mind her faltering confession, he knew exactly the picture Miss Roberts' careful teaching and her own ignorance of the world and its ways had painted in her mind, but mixed with his awful relief that her child was spared the stigma of illegitimacy which had surrounded her own birth, was the very real fear that she would never understand or even try to understand the outlook which had led to Barclay's association with a woman of Toinette's type. Little as he had seen of her, he had recognized in her the unmistakable inheritance of his own rigid Scotch ancestry underlying the coating of modern flippancy, and he felt very far from certain that Joy's conscience would ever allow her to see below the surface of the man she now knew Barclay to be, and discover for herself the sound foundations that lay beneath his light-hearted casual acceptance of life as experience and heredity had taught him to understand it.

Not because he had the slightest doubt as to the truth of the story Barclay told, but because he felt that he must leave Joy no possible loophole for further misunderstanding, he went with Barclay once again to Paris, and there, after four days' exploration of nooks and corners which only a man living as Barclay had lived would have known, they found a thoroughly frightened Toinette, who, threatened with the police and sundry other horrors, hid her fear under a torrent of vituperation that left Barclay unmoved and fairly flabbergasted Halliday, and admitted the truth of what she had done. They took her to a magistrate before they finally finished with her, and stood over her while she signed and swore to a statement which she never felt absolutely certain afterwards was not a death warrant which could be put into execution on the slightest provocation; and ultimately they left her, thankful to see the last of them, and for her ability to go back to her own comfortable *appartement* and her cabaret dancing, freed

from the fear of Barclay, which had led her to hide in one of the hovels of the Paris underworld, ever since his first furious interview with her following Joy's flight.

Halliday cabled to Cynthia and wrote to Joy, posting the letter so that it would reach Cayabana at least a month ahead of the date when he and Barclay planned to arrive. With the memory of the hatred he had felt for the man he now endeavoured to excuse, he found it difficult to realize how utterly he had come under the sway of the charm which had been young Barclay's stumblingblock from the days of his earliest boyhood. He was forced to admit that, though he condemned the life he had led, there was nothing in Barclay's character, as he himself had seen it, which would make him an undesirable husband for Joy or for any woman. He even found himself pleading his cause to Joy, using as his reason Barclay's motherless childhood and the fact that he had had no one to point out the idiotic folly of the life he led. But, for all the excuses he made, for all the plausible reasons he wrote to account for Toinette and her predecessors, he was far from certain of Joy's attitude and reception of her husband when he should ultimately take Barclay to Cayabana.

He heard from Cynthia twice before they sailed for Fijama, where the launch was to meet them and take them over to Cayabana, letters that endorsed his own half-formed fears as to Joy's feelings, and added perceptibly to his steadily-growing doubts as to the warmth of their reception.

Even Cynthia had to admit that Joy was difficult—was developing ideas and formulating opinions as to the rights of men to do as they pleased before marriage, and to expect bland acceptance of their peccadilloes from their wives afterwards. It almost seemed to Cynthia that the fact of the baby's illegitimacy had counted for much less in Joy's eyes than the fact that there had been other women than herself in Barclay's life, and that she had been the last, rather than the first, of a lengthy string, as her ignorance of men had pictured her.

"Men are different, Joy darling." On the veranda of the long, low house, built facing the white sands of Cayabana's coral beach, Cynthia tried to break through the impenetrable fence of reserve which the very mention

of Barclay's name brought into existence between herself and Joy. "They don't look at things as we do."

"They have no right to expect more than they give. It is dishonest." Joy's mouth and chin set in the stubborn line her mother recognized so well. "There's no reason why marriage shouldn't be as fair an exchange as any other. If I offer to exchange a certain definite object—that chicken, for example—and then I substitute a tough old hen without saying a word about the difference, then I'm dishonest. Every one would say so, and they'd be right. Then why isn't a man labelled dishonest and a thief if he takes everything a woman has to give, and instead of giving in return what he leads her to believe he is giving, she gets the dregs of something that isn't worth having? Something unclean and rotten that half a hundred other women have played pitch and toss with for years before. It's unfair and dishonest. It's stealing, as far as that goes, and I hate thieves."

"Is that the attitude you are going to take up when your husband comes?"

"*If* he comes, yes. If he has any decency at all he'll stay away. He's made trouble enough. The least he can do now is to stay away altogether and give me the chance of forgetting him."

"Is that wise, darling? He's the father of your child, you know."

"I didn't want a baby. The very thought of a baby of his makes me feel sick. I hope it'll die. I'm sorry to shock you, mother, but I do. I want to forget Stephen and everything to do with him. I was beginning to forget him. And now how shall I ever forget him, if all my life I'm to look at a child of his and see it perhaps grow up to be like him? I'd almost rather never have found out that that girl lied. What's been the good of it all? I know you and father did what you thought was best, but before he went home, at all events, I was rid of Stephen himself, which was something, and now it's all got to start over again. All the things I thought I was forgetting are cropping up again."

"There are very few women who claim any right to a man's past, Joy. For most of us the present and the future are enough."

"They're not enough for me. If I give the best I have to give, why should I be content to take in exchange something that is shop-soiled and damaged? It isn't reasonable. You might just as well tell father not to bring him, mother. I shan't see him, if he comes. I've suffered enough and I won't ever live with him again. It's bad enough to *have* to have the baby."

"He can compel you to live with him, Joy. At least, the law can."

"The law didn't compel you to go back to the Professor," Joy said stubbornly.

"He didn't want me. Stephen wants you, and you know what happens if you refuse. It means the Divorce Court."

"I don't care. I would rather be dragged through the worst mud of any Divorce Court than live in the sunshine and a clean street with Stephen, knowing what I know. Oh, mother, try and imagine it for yourself. The horror and the shame of it all. That woman's face between us all the time, and not only hers, but all the others. Dozens of others. I couldn't and I won't. It's unreasonable and unfair. I shall never go back to him."

The gist of the conversation Cynthia wrote in the letter Halliday got the morning they sailed, and with the letter in his hands he went to Barclay three or four days out.

"Has Joy's attitude about all this—apart from the legality of your marriage—ever struck you, Barclay?"

Barclay looked up from his book. He was almost himself again in the relief of knowing that Joy was safe, the lines gone from about his mouth and something of the old reckless devilry creeping again into his blue eyes.

"What d'you mean? Her attitude?"

"She's been brought up in a different school from the one in which you learnt your lessons of life. Sees things from a different standpoint. I've had a letter from her mother. It's only fair to tell you that you won't find Joy—amiable, when you get to Cayabana."

Across Barclay's mind flashed a series of pictures. Joy as she had first attracted him, a tempestuous little virago, holding a bleeding puppy in her arms. A haughty little damsel stalking past him through the gloomy hall of the

Ivy House. A forlorn, dripping object plodding through the rain with a white, scared face, and a hat that poured rivulets of water down her spine. Then, a later one, one of her in all the new dignity and pride of possession, blazing at Molly Fanshaw and himself, in the old Palace they had rented in Venice.

For the life of him he could not resist the grin of amusement which the pictures brought to his mind.

"She's got a will of her own, if that's what you mean. And the temper of a little fury. That's why I fell in love with her."

"She's got something else besides—unfortunately for you. It's not her will nor her temper that's going to cause you trouble. It's her Scotch conscience. You've overlooked the fact that she's my daughter. She happens to have inherited it, and it's given her ideas, to say the least of it. You won't find it easy, Barclay. She swears she won't even see you."

"She'll see me all right," Barclay said comfortably. "I know how to manage Joy. What'll you bet me, Halliday, that in a week from the time we land we're as thick as thieves again?"

Halliday laughed, though the laugh was not altogether a happy one.

"You're taking a good deal for granted, my dear chap. She's in a funny mood, so I warn you. No one knows better than I do, the stumblingblocks to happiness a Scotch conscience puts in your way. And that girl was about the limit."

"Toinette? M'm. She was a bit of a pill for Joy to swallow, I'll admit. But for all that, I'm willing to bet my last shirt that, given a week, I'll make her see things differently. I'm going to, anyway."

As luck would have it, he was never given the week. Never even given a day. Three days before they were due to land, just as he and Halliday strolled on deck after lunch, something happened that altered all their carefully-made plans and arrangements. There was a woman's scream of terror from the poop for'ard. A yell from the look-out. Something white and very small flashed past them on the wind, hanging, so it seemed to their fascinated eyes, in mid air over the shimmering, restless water, and

mingled with it all the rush of disciplined feet, and the grinding, reverberating jar of huge engines hastily reversed.

The next moment Halliday was alone, and all that was left of Barclay was his jacket and shoes flung aside as he dived.

They had a boat launched in no time. It seemed almost incredible, the speed with which they manned and lowered her. Far away astern something white and small bobbed on the surface of the water, disappeared, bobbed again. Between it and the ship, forging through the blue-sunny water with the long easy strokes of a practised swimmer, Barclay's dark head was just visible. Yard by yard, he was gaining on that bobbing white object. Behind him the boat, pulled by willing, eager arms, leapt steadily forward, when a yell from the Chief Officer, peering through his glasses, sent a roar of frantic hysterical cheers up to heaven. Barclay had reached the white object, had grabbed it with one arm and got it somehow across his back. The boat was barely fifty yards away, leaping through the water, when something black and triangular, and hideously sinister, sprang into view half a dozen yards from Barclay's shoulder. What happened afterwards no one could ever say very clearly. They heard the coxs'n of the boat shout something to the men pulling with every ounce of their strength. Saw Barclay kick wildly once—twice—and then, with one arm, wrench the child from his back and hurl it, with all the strength he could muster, into the arms of the coxs'n leaning forward at a perilous angle to catch it. The triangular black fin jabbed savagely forward. Something that might, or might not, have been a scream of pain floated upwards to the ashen-faced watchers on the ship's white deck, and a patch of rapidly-spreading crimson on the sunny-blue surface of the water settled Joy's problems once and for all.

CHAPTER XXI

THE shock of Barclay's death, the hysterical letter from the baby's incoherent, passionately-grateful mother, the signed tribute of sympathy and admiration from every one on board of his magnificent

courage, did for Joy's soul what Barclay himself could never have done. In those first days of dull realization of her widowhood, following Halliday's arrival, grey-faced and alone, on the little quay at Cayabana, all the misery and shame and imaginary dishonour of her married life were swept away before the recollection of Barclay's selfless heroism. Before Halliday's picture of him, forging through the shark-infested water to rescue the child of a steerage passenger, the remembrance of Toinette and all those other women she so thoroughly loathed faded into the background, and having faded, died for all time. Instead of the memory of Barclay in the studio, surrounded by those other women, whom he had so carelessly and lightly loved, which had haunted every hour of her conscious or unconscious mind since her meeting with Toinette, she saw him as Halliday meant that she should—careless, reckless, as she had always known him, but with round his sleek, dark head the halo of a man who has given his life gladly for that of a fellow-creature. In the years that followed —when, with a wider knowledge of men and the world, came also a broader-minded understanding of the pitfalls that lie in wait for men of Barclay's type—she never thought of him apart from the unknown baby, for whose sake he had gone to his death, as thoughtlessly and casually as he had done everything all his life. And in that picture of him—flinging the child to safety before he went to his own hideous end—the tears she had never been able to weep until then washed and cleansed her soul of every thought of bitterness, and left behind only a treasured memory of a man who had loved her and his fellow-men enough to sacrifice his life for the unknown child of one of them.

With Barclay's death, too, all her thoughts of the child coming to her changed, as completely as Halliday's story of his splendid courage changed her conception of his character. For the first time she began to look forward to its birth, to realize the wonder of maternity and motherhood, and it was an almost happy Joy who sat with Cynthia sewing infinitesimal garments, while she waited for her time to come.

When the time *did* come she hung so perilously near to the borderline of life and death that she knew nothing and no one, and the baby was three weeks old before she

was even sufficiently conscious of things about her to remember his existence. But from the first moment when his little rose-petal fingers curled round her own and held them tight, she lived for nothing and no one but the boy. She gave her whole life, unhesitatingly and unquestioningly, in those first years of his delicate, terribly-fragile baby-hood, towards making of Stephen's son the man she meant him to be, and to making up to him, as far as it lay in her power, for the loss of his father; and there came a day when she gloried in the knowledge that to Barclay's son she represented the world and everything in it.

He was an extraordinarily sunny-tempered baby—a fact, the more remarkable, because of the unhappiness and misery which had enveloped his conception—and he lay for hours gurgling with pleasure at the coloured balls Joy fixed to the rail of his cot, and the gay balloons she hung where his huge blue eyes could watch them as they danced and swung in the air. Later, as he grew older, she played with him for hours on end, took him driving with her, and taught him herself his first baby lessons.

She stayed at Cayabana with Halliday and Cynthia for the first three years of baby Stephen's life, utterly happy in the sunshine and peace which surrounded them, burying all the sorrows of her lonely, isolated childhood in the love and care they lavished on her and her son. Robin's arrival—at the instigation of Lady McInnis for the second time—when the baby was eighteen months old, to act as his chief guardian, stood out as the only event of importance during those three years. A Robin rather alarmed at the grinning black faces about her, a little greyer and primmer, but, otherwise, a Robin very little changed from the little spinster who had taught and loved his mother during her own childhood. That, and Nigel Eveleigh's quarterly trips across to the island in a groggy little steam launch, which was his newest possession and which ranked next to Joy herself in his affections, were the only things that ever happened in those peaceful years following Barclay's death.

Eveleigh's proposals were as regular as his visits—a part and parcel of the usual routine with always the same answer, and he took his refusals with the same dogged perseverance which characterized his every action. Joy

gave him her friendship gladly, but the example of Cynthia and Halliday had proved to her, as nothing else could have done, the existence of that deeper "something" which she had first discussed so glibly with Barclay, on the day when he asked her to marry him.

When little Stephen was three, McInnis was transferred, and he gave to Joy, for her own property, the bungalow at Mayagonga which had always been her favourite corner of Fijama. She loved the tropics. Loved the happy-go-lucky days of perpetual sunshine and ceaselessly blue skies, and she had no desire whatever to go back to England. Barclay's will left her a much wealthier woman than she had ever thought possible, knowing, as she did, so little of financial questions, and though she took very little interest in money, beyond the satisfaction she obtained in being able to buy for herself and others the things she and they wanted, the possession of both wealth and property troubled her scarcely at all. She left the management of Grey Towers and of the big old barn in Scotland entirely to the care of Barclay's lawyers, would have sold them, and got rid of them definitely, had they not been part of little Stephen's heritage. The studio she did sell, just as it stood, save for Stephen's pictures. With the cheque it realized in her hands, she felt that the last link with the things she meant to forget had been broken, and because everything to do with it had still power to hurt horribly, and she wanted to put it completely away from her, she gave the money it brought, untouched, to the first charity she could think of.

With the bungalow in Mayagonga as a refuge from the hot weather, a house in Queenstown for the winter, with Robin in perpetual fluttering attendance on a very autocratic small boy, who bullied her mercilessly, and loved her beyond anything on earth save his mother, and with Cynthia and Halliday within easy reach, she started life absolutely afresh, and it was a young woman, bubbling over with high spirits and *joie-de-vivre*, without apparently a care or a responsibility in the world, who, having tea at the Cotton Tree one sunny April afternoon, five years after Barclay's death, heard her name in a voice she vaguely recognized and looked up into the periwinkle-blue eyes of Peter Conway.

CHAPTER XXII

WHAT happened afterwards was a foregone conclusion to every one save, perhaps, the two most concerned. All Joy's friends—and they were legion in those gay, care-free days—mapped out her future from the first moment when Conway's hand shot out to grip hers and his blue eyes looked into her brown ones. It is certain that from the day when he first met her amongst the glowing splendour of the Cotton Tree gardens, he became her devoted slave. During the three weeks that his ship swung idly on the tide, anchored midway between the City wharves and the sandy stretch of the Palisadoes, he followed her blindly wherever she went, played tennis with her, bathed with her, motored with her, danced with her. They were like children in the frank enjoyment of each other's company, and though every one about them arranged their future, engaged and married them, it is very doubtful whether either Joy or Conway himself, now first lieutenant on a miniature cruiser, even gave a thought to anything beyond the immediate present and its daily round of pleasure.

Stephen frankly adored the young sailor, who paid a formal call on the nursery in all the glory of blue cloth and gold lace, and from the day that he was first taken to see the ship in the harbour his career was a definite certainty. Together they took him on board to tea in the ward-room, stood by watching his rapt reverent eyes as a signalman laboriously explained the mystery of multi-coloured flags, tucked him into the little white launch and took him, shrieking with joy when the blue water tumbled in showers of spray over the gunwale and soaked him, for a cruise round the sunny harbour.

"He's a toppin' kid, Joy." They had just come back from a swim at the Country Club, and were all having lunch together under the gay, striped awnings of the veranda. "I can do with a kid like that. He doesn't know what fear is. 'Member the way he started in to dive this mornin'?"

Joy's eyes rested on the wet, dark head of the small boy, who was so ridiculously like his father.

"He adores you. Peter, hasn't the time flown? Can you really believe it's six years since you and I sneaked in at the side door of the Ivy House?"

Conway flung back his head and shouted with laughter, startling a chink-a-ling, dabbling its fan-shaped black tail in the basin of the fountain under the mango tree on the lawn.

"And I tuned the piano. What a priceless rag. I say, Joy, old thing, you never met the mater, did you? I heard from her this mornin'. She and the Old Man are comin' out for a trip. They're feelin' a bit flat since Netta got married and they've always had a weak corner for Fijama. Honeymooned here or somethin' of the sort, and not a bad place either, by the way. The Old Man's got our ancient family Ark goin' again, and they're comin' out at the end of August. Doin' a trip all round the West Indies and puttin' in a month or so here, sentimentalizin' over familiar bits, I s'pose. There isn't an earthly chance of my bein' here myself. We're off to some unpronounceable place Friday. But you might look 'em up, will you? Say you've seen me and all that. I'd like you to meet the mater."

"Of course I will. Can't you manage to get leave and come over to see them, Peter?"

"Lord, no, my child. Nothin' doin' that line. I'm of importance these days, though you'd scarcely believe it. Can I come and have dinner with you to-night, by the way? We might go down to the Cotton Tree and dance afterwards, unless you're booked up."

"I'd love it. Have you ever been inland, Peter? Right up behind there in the hills?"

"No. Why?"

"I've got a bungalow there. The most heavenly place. I meant to fix up a week-end there before you sailed. The Adderly girls and Susie Dunlop and some of the men from the Camp. Are you really sailing on Friday?"

"Fact, my dear, worse luck."

"I wonder if I could arrange it for Thursday night. Just a picnic-dinner up there. It's only a forty-mile run. We could go up early, you and I, and get the servants waked up and tell the others to come later. It might be rather fun."

"Why drag in the others? Let's go alone. That Adderly girl giggles and makes me want to slap her."

"Alone?" She wrinkled her forehead. "Would you rather?"

"Heaps. Let's have a day in the country on our own, Joy. For old times' sake, what? 'Member the day we went to Portsmouth? Toppin' day it was too. As long as I'm on board by ten it'll be O.K. We sail at dawn Friday and I don't want to be late."

"We can do it easily. Dine at seven and leave at eight. It's down hill all the way home. You're sure you'd rather, Peter? Or is there any one else you'd rather I asked and not the Adderly girls or Susie?"

"No one. Just the two of us. That's a fixture, then, old thing? What time do we start?"

"Any time. I'll wire the servants and tell them to expect us and to get some food into the house. If we leave here at eleven we can get there for lunch."

"Right. I'll be here." He got up. "Come and have tea on board. It's cool out in the harbour."

"I've been to tea five times since you came."

"Then make it six and a round number. I'll wait and take you, and then I can come back with you to dinner. Just as well make the best of the time that's left. It'll be a year or thereabouts before we'll get here again."

They went up to Mayagonga on Thursday morning, just the two of them in the little two-seater Joy drove herself. A negro boy brought her dressing-case down the steps just as they started, tucked it into the back, and Conway's eyebrows went up.

"I say, I never thought of changin'. D'you mind?"

She laughed.

"I'm going to stay a couple of days, Peter. You won't mind driving the car back yourself, will you? I adore Mayagonga. There's something that gets into your blood up there. Gives you a nice feeling inside. Besides, I've been racketing lately. Too many late nights, and I want a slack-off. Two days up there will square me up again."

"You're not *ill*, are you?"

"Me? Gracious, no. I'm never ill, my dear boy. You'll know what Mayagonga does for you when you get up there. It's the worst place I know for giving you thrills.

I can feel them running up my spine as soon as I start up the last hill. Like lightning does."

He watched her manipulation of the car as they swung round the dizzy precipitous corners.

"You've remembered your lessons, I see."

She nodded.

"M'm. I never drive the car without thinking of you. The adventure of it, Peter. Me—Joy Beresford—actually driving a car. I reached the heights of my ambitions that day. By the way, did you say your sister was married?"

His blue eyes clouded.

"Yes. Married a fellow called Corday. No one you knew. No one anyone decent knows as far as I can make out. It's knocked the mater over badly. Personally, I can't stand the fellow. And he's twice Netta's age to start with."

"Corday?" The name was vaguely, distinctly familiar, struck some long silent chord at the back of her memory. "What an awful pity. What's he like, Peter? Why don't you like him?"

"He's a wrong 'un. Decent enough to look at, and got money too, though I shouldn't care to inquire too closely where it comes from. Races a lot. Some young fool took him uninvited to the house where Netta was stayin' with friends for Ascot. You needn't try to remember him, my child. It's not likely you met him."

"I believe I did." She was still puzzling her brain to recollect the origin of that faintly-twanging chord. "Corday, Peter? The name's perfectly familiar. Oh, I *know* where it was. Just after I was married. A friend of Stephen's gave a party and a man called Corday sat next to me. An odious creature. It can't be *that* man, Peter. He's horrible."

"So's my estimable brother-in-law. A loathsome swine. You don't know anythin' about him, do you?"

"Nothing. I only met him twice. Once then and once at Epsom. He was racing there. Peter," her eyes looked troubled, "it can't be the same man. He's quite horrible. I hated sitting next to him even. Wait a minute. I'll remember his Christian name in a moment. It's unusual." She swerved suddenly to avoid a mule cart driven by a peacefully sleeping black boy. "It's something beginning

with ' J.' Don't tell me. Not ' John ' or ' James ' or anything ordinary like that. I've got it. Jocelyn. Jocelyn Corday."

" Yes," Peter said grimly. " I thought it was. Jocelyn Corday's the name of the man Netta married, and you can't tell me anythin' nasty that I'm not ready to believe about him. An unpleasant, plausible sweep's my opinion of him, for what it's worth. Netta's a headstrong little devil and she'd listen to no one."

" I wish she hadn't married *him.*"

" So do I. However, seein' as how she's done it——" he broke off as they swung round a bend in the road, saw Mayagonga on the hill above them. " That your place? M'm. Not surprised you're fond of it. Some place that, by Gad."

They spent a blissful, utterly happy day, ate an alfresco lunch on the veranda, and took tea to the northern coast of the island, twenty-three miles farther on, bathing there in the shimmering blue water, splashing like children in the freshwater pool beside it, where the waterfall thunders over the cliffs behind on to the white coral beach below. Then back to an early dinner in the pretty little dining-room, the table lighted by candles under rosy shades, waited on by a couple of silent-footed native boys in their spotless white uniform.

The little silver clock on the mantelpiece struck eight just as they finished their coffee and were lighting cigarettes on the veranda outside. At the foot of the steps the car waited for Conway to drive it back, and behind the hills the vivid summer lightning flickered and danced ceaselessly.

" Still afraid of thunder? "

He looked down at her as a more than usually vivid flash lit up every corner of the dusky, shadowed garden. " 'Member how scared you used to be? "

" You get used to it out here. And this is only make-believe. It's been a lovely day, Peter, and awfully jolly to have seen you again. I'll look your people up when they come and bring them up here for a couple of days, if they'd like it."

" That'd be tophole." He lit another cigarette, flung the finished one into a clump of bushes opposite. " It's been a clinkin' three weeks. Sounds like Mrs. Whatser-

name's novel, what? I say, drive me as far as the gate, will you?"

"And walk back alone?" She laughed lightly. "How selfish of you, Peter. But I'll come."

She slipped in the clutch, ran the little car slowly to the big open gate, white and ghostly in the heavy darkness, and then jumped out making room for him in the driving seat.

"Good-night, Peter. I've had the loveliest day."

He got out and stood beside her, bareheaded, his cap on the seat of the car.

"I wonder if you could find time now and then to write to me?"

"Where to? Lieutenant Peter Conway, H.M.S. *Butterfly*, somewhere in the Atlantic?"

"Write to Bermuda. That's our base. *Will* you write, Joy?"

"Of course I will. So will Stephen. We'll both write and tell you everything that's happening. I don't want to hurry you, Peter, but I think you ought to be going."

He took her hand, held it for a second, then dropped it.

"Good night, old thing. It's been a toppin' day. I'm awfully sorry we're goin' so soon. I'll write and let you know when we're likely to get back." He tucked his long legs into the car, touched the self-starter. "Come here a minute, Joy. I want you."

She came unsuspectingly, stood beside the car close to his arm, and suddenly he stooped sideways and kissed her, quickly and fiercely, twice, on her vivid scarlet mouth.

"You won't forget me so quickly after that," he said coolly, and slipped forward into the shadows.

Joy could never remember afterwards whether she stood for a minute or an hour in the throbbing darkness by the white gate.

Two things only stood out in flaming, blazing capitals. The first that Peter's kisses were the only ones that had ever counted for anything or ever would, and the second that she had discovered at last the "something deeper" for which she'd been looking all her life.

CHAPTER XXIII

THE Heriots came out towards the end of August, and, as she had promised, Joy went over to call on them on board the yacht a couple of days after they landed.

She was oddly curious to see Peter's mother. He had talked so much of her, and with the memory of Peter's kisses still treasured in her mind, every one belonging to him took on a new, deep significance. It amused her a little to see the quick note of interrogation that flashed into Lady Heriot's eyes when his name came up.

"I met your son, Lady Heriot. His ship was here three or four months ago, and he asked me to look you up. He was awfully kind to Stephen and to me. My little boy is a real hero-worshipper, and he adored Mr. Conway."

"Peter loves all children."

Out of what Joy thought were most vividly-alive eyes she had ever seen, Diana Heriot took in every detail of the girl who knew her beloved son. Joy puzzled her. She had spent months in Fijama at one time or another, and she flattered herself that she could place most of the residents. There were wives of Government officials, bravely struggling to put up a fight to live decently and educate their children on salaries that were barely sufficient to keep one. There were planters' wives, sunburnt women who were more at home in short skirts or riding-breeches than in the flimsy silks and chiffons of calling frocks. There were the pretty, dusky-eyed, half-caste daughters of English men or women who had married the better type of native, and there were the officers' wives of the white regiment stationed at Camp. All these types she knew and recognized, but when she tried to fit Joy into any of the pigeonholes in her mind she failed hopelessly. It never struck her to connect this dainty, exquisitely-turned-out woman with the "jolly kid" Peter had told her about six years before, and at last she gave up the puzzle and accepted Joy at her face value, as an exceptionally attractive little woman.

Heriot made no secret of her attraction for him.

"She's a damn nice little woman," he told his wife one

night when Joy had dined with them. "It's a long time since I took such a fancy to anyone."

"Darling Bill, you're an inveterate flirt, and you know it But she *is* nice. I'll grant you that. I wonder if Peter thinks it too."

"Bein' no fool and my son, the chances are that he does," Heriot said cheerfully. "Did he mention her when he wrote?"

"Just casually. Said that he'd met her and asked her to call. Peter's not exactly communicative, you know."

"Still waters." Heriot chuckled. "She's a damn nice little girl anyway, and I shan't complain if he shares my opinion. Time he chucked the Navy and settled down. I'm gettin' a good deal too old to run Valley Royal alone."

"You'll never be old, my dear."

"Damn it, Diana, I'm seventy-three. I don't look it, and I don't feel it, but I am, nevertheless. I can't hang on much longer, and I don't mind sayin' that I'd like to see that boy lookin' after the place with a wife of his own before I peg out."

They saw a good deal of Joy one way or another during the month the *Corisande* lay off the Cotton Tree, and finally took both her and little Stephen for a ten-day cruise round the coast before they set sail for Fijama's sister islands. It was the night before they came back to Queenstown that Diana Heriot caught Joy alone and tackled her about Peter.

"Are you going to marry Peter, my dear?"

"Dear Lady Heriot, he hasn't asked me."

Diana laughed.

"Is he going to?"

"I don't know. That is the truth. Honestly I don't know. I think he is—fond of me. I thought at first it was casual friendship. Then the night before he went away, and his letters—— Indeed, I don't know."

"Would you marry him if he asked you? I'm an inquisitive old woman I know, but I'm his mother and he's my only son. Would you?"

Peter's kisses were nearly five months old, but the memory of them even now sent the blood racing to Joy's cheeks. She looked straight into the vividly-alive eyes of Peter's mother.

"Yes," she said steadily. "If he asked me, I would."

The little devil, whose particular care Joy was, had been out of work for years, so that it was only to be expected that he would be looking for a job before long, and that he might reasonably expect to find it amongst her concerns, which had already provided him with so much profitable amusement and occupation. So that he was well on to his job when he arranged that, during the three days Peter's father and mother spent at Mayagonga, learning all they could of the girl who they had fully decided should be Peter's wife, Halliday decided that Cynthia wanted a change and brought her to Mayagonga, unexpectedly, as a surprise for Joy, arriving just as Lady Heriot and Joy herself sat down to discuss tea and cakes, and, for the thousandth time, Peter, on the sheltered, orchid-hung veranda.

Joy had forgotten the shadow overhanging her birth in the happiness and peace of her six years in the tropics. She'd practically forgotten the Professor and the loneliness of her childhood. Cynthia's arrival seemed to her the one thing necessary—that her mother and Peter's mother should meet and be friends.

She saw the car coming, recognized its occupants, and was at the steps to meet them before it had done more than negotiate the tricky curve into the gate, where Peter had kissed her.

"It's my father and mother." She spoke over her shoulder to Lady Heriot. "I didn't know that they even *thought* of coming. How perfectly splendid for them to turn up just when you're here too. I'll take them to their rooms and we'll be back in five minutes."

Lady Heriot watched her affectionately. She was pleased to see the warmth of the girl's welcome for her mother. It was another feather in Joy's cap. Modern girls, even Netta, rather resented any display of affection. She remembered the kiss Netta had given her when she left for her honeymoon—a shamefaced little peck of a kiss. She liked the way Joy led the little veiled figure into the house, one arm round her waist, chattering happily and excitedly, stammering almost imperceptibly in her pleasure. The father, superintending the removal of luggage from the car, was good-looking—a distinctly handsome person with an exaggerated edition of Joy's dogged square chin. She

decided that they would be eminently suitable as Peter's father and mother-in-law. It would be a tremendous weight off her mind when she saw Peter safely married. You never knew what sort of people—by people her mind meant women—naval men met, especially in the heathenish corners of the world to which Peter was always being sent. You had only to look round any naval seaport and see the extraordinary people who managed, somehow or other, to catch youthful sailor-men, to realize the danger Peter ran. She had gone through years of anxiety lest he might, perchance, come home with a dusky bride from Malta, or a yellow one from China, entirely overlooking the fact that, if anything, Peter was even more fastidious as to his women friends than she was for him. He was so good-natured. That was her chief fear of him. So easy-going and essentially chivalrous, and you never knew where chivalry led men. Peter's father had laughed at her, of course. He laughed at most things—except Netta's wedding, by the way—and she had laughed with him as she generally did, without in the least losing sight of the anxiety. It was so essential that Peter, the last of the Heriots, should have a desirable wife of unimpeachable birth and credentials. And now this girl——. Really it seemed almost a special decree of Providence, that out of all the people he might have considered, he had hit on a wife so eminently suitable as this brown-eyed, curly-haired slip of womanhood, who seemed more like the sister than the mother of the boy she so plainly worshipped.

She poured out another cup of tea, feeling singularly grateful to Providence for the kindly personal interest that august personage had taken in her adored son, helped herself to lace cakes and guava jelly with frank enjoyment. The world was a satisfactory place, take it all round, and with Peter married——

She heard Joy's voice in the little black and white hall, utterly care-free, entirely happy.

"You've heard me speak of Peter, Mother." They came out on the veranda all together, Joy and the little woman she called "mother," behind them the big man with the dogged chin. "This is his mother. I hope so much——" Her gay little voice died suddenly, frozen into silence at the expression on the faces of the two elder women.

Cynthia stood quite still, staring, speechless, but Lady Heriot had risen and was speaking very quietly, with a little hard note in her voice that Joy had never noticed before.

"I didn't expect to find that Joy's mother was *you*, Cynthia," she said.

CHAPTER XXIV

JOY stood on the steps of the veranda next morning, watching the Heriot's suitcases being strapped on to the luggage grid, at the back of the car.

She was glad they were going. It had been a ghastly evening, worse almost than anything she could possibly have imagined. Just rotten luck, of course. Her usual luck when you came to think of it. She wondered if she would ever forget the stare of speechless horror with which her mother, as white as the filmy muslin of her frock, had met the other woman's raised eyebrows and the ice-cold, well-bred, little tinkle of her voice. It was her first realization of the cloud that surrounded her birth. Looking back she wondered dully how she'd ever forgotten it, and why the devil, who so carefully mismanaged her affairs, had ever let her think for a minute that she, the illegitimate daughter of a man of whom no one had ever heard, and a woman who lived, and had lived for years, with him openly and unashamedly, in what the world called sin, could possibly be a suitable wife, in the eyes of his parents at all events, for Lord Heriot's only son.

She could almost have laughed, miserable as she was, at the recollection of old Lord Heriot's discomfiture when he, too, had grasped the thing that Peter's mother told him. He had tried so hard to pretend he didn't care. Almost she believed—which, had she but known it, was the case—that he himself didn't really care very much. He had held her hand in his big brown one muttering, incoherently, something about "narrow-minded women" and "sleepin' dogs," and, just before she went to bed, had stooped and kissed her rather shamefacedly.

"It'll all come right, my dear. A lot of fuss and bother over nothin'. Don't you worry. Peter's no fool, and if

he's only got a tenth of his father's sense he'll know which side his bread's buttered. I shan't interfere."

She'd kissed him back quite frankly, but she felt pretty certain that however much Peter knew about his bread and butter, she could never marry him. Lady Heriot had made that perfectly clear, although she had been more than kind.

"It's so difficult to explain, Joy," Peter's mother said for the dozenth time. "But Peter can't take chances. I can't let him. He's my only son and he's the last of a splendid old family. I owe it to all the Heriots who've gone before to do my best to see that the name is carried on without a stain on it. If he married you——"

Joy hit back with the only weapon available.

"Aren't we taking a great deal for granted, Lady Heriot? Peter hasn't *asked* me to marry him, even."

"But he will. I've read between the lines. He's like that. Thoughtful and deliberate and cautious. It's only a question of time."

"I don't believe the fact that I'm illegitimate will matter a row of pins to Peter."

"Of course, it won't. He's young and he's in love with you. He won't care a scrap—now. It's for you, if you love him, to see that he doesn't suffer for his own folly."

Joy winced.

"Is it such folly to be in love with me?"

"For a man in Peter's position, yes. Oh, my dear, I'm horrible I know, but I must think of him. There is such a thing as heredity for one thing. And, for another, Peter's wife must be above suspicion."

"What have I done that is not above suspicion?"

"You're making it terribly hard for me, Joy. Don't you see that Lord Heriot's wife must be able to produce a family tree without a blemish of any kind."

"You talked about heredity. What has heredity to do with it?"

"What your mother did, her daughter may do."

Joy laughed. She couldn't help it.

"Peter isn't the Professor. I defy anyone to live with the Professor and not run away sooner or later. Besides, according to the law I *am* legitimate. The law decided

that I was the Professor's daughter. Where does your argument come in now?"

"You *know* you are not. You can't look me in the face, Joy, and tell me that you believe yourself to be Professor Beresford's daughter."

"I'm glad I can't. It's the last thing on earth I should want to be. Are you going to tell Peter?"

"I leave that to you."

"He won't listen to me. I know Peter. He won't care."

"I thought you loved him."

"I do love him. I've loved him for years. What has that got to do with it?"

"Everything. If you love him enough you'll see that he never suffers in any way which you can prevent. He won't mind now. He's in love with you, and love covers a multitude of sins. But there'll come a time when he'll hate it. A time when he's asked your name and pedigree and can't give it. And it'll hurt horribly. Peter's proud —enormously proud of his name and his family. He doesn't say so, but he is. When he was a very little boy, he used to come and say his prayers to me in the picture gallery at Valley Royal, amongst all the portraits of the Heriots, and he always used to put in at the end, quite on his own account: 'And thank God for making me a Heriot.' That's one of the reasons he hated Netta's marriage. It was beneath a Heriot to marry a man of whom she knew nothing, and he resented it horribly. *Now* don't you understand, Joy?"

"I don't know. I can see your point of view, although I don't agree with it. It isn't as if my father were a criminal or something to be ashamed of. He's a straightforward gentleman, and it's not a crime to love a woman too much to stand by and see her die for want of something he can give her."

"I can sympathize with him and with your mother. But it doesn't alter the fact that your birth prevents you from being a suitable wife for Peter."

"Listen, Lady Heriot. I'll make a bargain with you. If I give you my word to refuse Peter when he asks me to marry him—always supposing that he does ask me—will you promise me faithfully that you won't tell him what I am?"

"I will gladly promise that, Joy."

Joy stood up. They were talking after breakfast, waiting for the car to come and take her guests back to the yacht. Cynthia had wanted to go; had begged Joy, with tears in her eyes, to let her go.

"It's my fault, Joy darling. I ought never to have come. I would give all I have to see you happy, and I have ruined your life."

Joy had stopped the trembling voice with her lips.

"Darling, you are never to say that. Nothing and no one can ever come again between us. Whatever happens *we'll* stick together—you and father and I. And I've got Stephen. Isn't that enough?"

The car came round from the garage, a black chauffeur grinning amiably at the wheel.

"That's a bargain, then, Lady Heriot?"

"As long as you don't marry Peter I will never tell him." She held out her hand and for a second took Joy's, holding it fast. "I wish this hadn't happened, Joy dear."

"I shall never marry Peter unless you, yourself, ask me to," said Joy evenly.

She went on to the steps to speak to the chauffeur, shading her eyes from the glare of the early morning sun. After all it had been rather a hopeless dream. The luck of being Peter's wife couldn't, of course, come her way. From the very beginning of things luck had deliberately avoided her, and she ought to have grown wise to its tricks by this time. From her own point of view Lady Heriot had been right. In the eyes of the Heriots Peter's wife must be above suspicion, and she wasn't, though it wasn't her fault. Just luck. Rotten luck. The same fate that had taken her to meet Toinette and spoilt everything in the first place. She heard Lord Heriot's heavy step behind her on the veranda, turned and smiled at him. He looked utterly wretched.

"I'd have sold my soul rather than have this happen." He took her hand, patting it. "You'll believe it's none of my doin's, my dear. Peter'd be damned lucky to get you, family or no family."

"Dear Lord Heriot, I quite understand. I don't agree with Lady Heriot, but I can really understand what she is afraid of. You needn't fear that I shall ever marry

Peter, much as I love him, until both you and Lady Heriot ask me to." She stooped and touched his hand with her lips. "I shall always remember Peter's father as the most perfect gentleman I have ever known. Just as I knew that Peter's father was bound to be perfect in every detail."

"You're the only one who ever knew it, my dear. But his mother worships the ground he walks on. You'll try not to think hardly of her, Joy?"

"I shan't think hardly of either of you. I couldn t since you belong so closely to Peter."

She watched them drive away, went back to Cynthia crying softly in her own room, her head on Halliday's shoulder.

"Darling, there's nothing in the world to cry for. Father, shake her, do anything. Only don't let her cry like that. It's all over and done with and if they want to try and take Peter away from me they can. I shan't marry him, because I've promised not to until Lady Heriot asks me to, which I don't think is very likely. But there's one thing they can't take away, and that's the memory of his kisses. I shall keep that to the end of my life, just as, whether I marry him or not, I shall keep his love. I don't know how I know it, but I do. And in face of that I can't see that one single thing matters. It's just what Lord Heriot said it was. A lot of fuss over nothing. Let's go to the river and swim it off. My brain feels as though it wanted spring-cleaning, and nothing else does it better than the pool under the waterfall. Darling, did you think for an instant that after being without my mother for seventeen years, I was going to let you go away, pretending a lot of lies, just so that another woman could think I wasn't your daughter. It just shows that you don't know much about me. Are you coming, Father?"

Halliday came over to where she stood, tipped her lips to his and kissed them. His voice was not quite steady.

"You're a daughter I'm very proud of, my dear," he said.

CHAPTER XXV

PETER'S letters were, of necessity, irregular, posted at whatever port he happened to touch, but even, before the first one came, Joy knew exactly what to expect from them. Long, boyish screeds, full of his work and his doings, the places he had seen, the people he had met. It was weeks before the first hint of a personal note crept into them, but she treasured them all, kissed them, and even cried over them a little, in the first glow of happiness at the wonder of the world generally and of Peter especially. Insensibly she began to fill in the blanks he left between the lines. She knew perfectly well, for instance, that when he said in one letter, written four months after he left Fijama, "I shall never forget the drive down to Gonga Mountain Road," he meant that it was because her kisses had driven it into his memory. Just as when she wrote in reply, "I have just come back from a walk to the gate to see the moonlight over the valley" she knew that *he* would know, perfectly well, that she was remembering the dazing revelation which had come to them both, where the white gate led from the croton-bordered avenue on to the twisting mountain road. Once he added a postscript, "I am counting the days till we put into Fijama again. It's by far the best of any port this side of the world." And again, "When I come back can we have another day at Mayagonga? It's a topping place."

Little by little the personal note pushed its way further and further. The letter that said, "I couldn't have believed it possible to miss anyone as much as I miss you," she kept under her pillow for nights and the one that, instead of the boyish "Cheerio, old thing," with which his letters usually ended, finished up with "Good-night, Joy dear," she carried next her heart until it was in danger of complete dissolution.

Sometimes she laughed at her own childish folly—remembering that she was twenty-four with a six-year-old son, and not a sentimental flapper of sixteen—but she still tucked his letters under her pillow and kissed them, because she couldn't kiss Peter himself, before she went to sleep and when she woke each morning.

That had all been before the Heriots came—and went. Afterwards, in the first flush of her good resolutions, she locked away the letters when they came, treasuring them none the less, but resolutely refusing to read into them more than they actually said, and really trying to put their vague, almost imperceptible tenderness out of her mind.

She shut up Mavagonga with its memories, and went back for the rest of the hot weather to Cayabana with Cynthia and Halliday. She left two of his letters unanswered, save for a scanty, impersonal little note, saying that she was going away and didn't know exactly when she would be back, and even seriously contemplated, in the first white-hot flame of martyr-like self-sacrifice, writing to Eveleigh and telling him that she'd changed her mind and would marry him, and so put herself once and for all outside Peter's scheme of life. The puzzled note of hurt reproach in his next letter sent her hot-foot to her writing-table. She wondered dazedly how she could ever have caused him even a moment's pain by her letters, forgetting, poor child, the greater pain still to come; said all the silly little trifles that make a letter worth receiving, and banished for ever, amazed that she could ever have considered it for a moment, the idea of marrying Eveleigh, who would have taken her, as she knew, and been glad of the chance, had she blared her love for Peter through a megaphone from the house-tops.

Cynthia and Halliday watched her, vaguely puzzled. They both knew, as well as she did, that nothing would induce her to break her promise to Lady Heriot. She hadn't the foggiest intention of ever marrying Peter, but if she fretted over that fact at all she certainly never showed it. She was as happy as a care-free child in those long days of sunshine, spent on the veranda facing the white beach, with Stephen, playing tennis with Halliday on the really good court he had made behind the bungalow, or riding with him and with Cynthia over the huge estate that, with three other smaller ones, made up the whole of the island. She wrote to Peter, cruising about in the Atlantic, here, there, and everywhere, every week, sometimes twice, and when his letters came, either singly or in bunches as the ship's movements necessitated, she shut

herself up in her room to read them and hugged Stephen for no special reason when she came out.

Once, after the *Butterfly* had stayed for a month in Quebec, Peter sent her a huge photograph of himself in all the glory of blue and gold in an extravagant silver frame. He had scrawled "Peter" across one corner in his straggly, untidy writing, and she stood it on a table all by itself, as a devout Catholic puts a statue of the Virgin Mother, by the side of her bed, where it was the last thing she saw at night and the first thing in the morning. All very ridiculous and very childish, of course, but very wonderful, viewed from the proper standpoint.

Only once did her gay spirits droop, and that when Cynthia, still puzzled and not altogether happy, touched on the subject one morning after a big bunch of Peter's letters had arrived for Joy, with a parcel for Stephen enclosing a magnificent picture book.

"Are you going to keep your promise, Joy?"

Joy, explaining pictures to a wide-eyed small boy, looked up.

"Promise? To Lady Heriot, you mean? Of course I am."

"Then is it treating this boy quite fairly, dear?"

Joy gave up the book to the child. Her eyes narrowed and darkened, her chin tilted to the angle Cynthia knew so well.

"I'm not going to give up his letters, Mother. I didn't promise that. I said I wouldn't marry him, and I won't."

"Does *he* know that? Aren't you leading him on to a very nasty tumble, darling?"

"I'm not going to cross bridges before I come to them, Mother. Peter hasn't asked me to marry him yet. I dare say he never will. It's quite probable that I won't ever see him again. I've half decided to take Stephen to England, next hot weather, and then on to the Continent, and Peter'll never propose to me by letter." She laughed suddenly, genuinely, at the memory of Peter's halting tendernesses. "His letters are the greatest joy of my life, and if I like to build up a lot of silly castles, knowing perfectly well that I'm building them up for the sake of knocking them down again, I'm not hurting anyone else but myself, am I? Our letters aren't love letters. Any

one in the world could read them. But they just make all the difference, and if Peter corners me I can let him down lightly. He hasn't the vaguest idea that I'm in love with him. He's not that sort, and I don't think he really knows that he's in love with me. He's unlike other people. But I won't stop writing to him, and I'm not going to tell him not to write to me. His mother can't have everything her own way, though I'm certainly going to keep my promise. I'm every bit as proud as she is."

In the middle of November she went back to Queenstown with Robin and Stephen, partly because she didn't want too much time on her hands for thought, and partly because Eveleigh wrote that he had three months' leave and meant to spend it in Fijama. His letter was characteristic.

"I shall come whether you want me or not because until I see you actually married to some other chap, I shall hang on in the hope that you'll marry me in the end. You needn't be afraid that I shall worry you, because I shan't. I can be more than content with friendship for the time being."

His grave, quiet kindliness did her good, gave her balance, as it were, and with Peter's ship at the opposite side of the Atlantic, and likely to be there for months, she was thoroughly happy all through the winter, a gay little butterfly of a woman, surrounded with every comfort and luxury that money could provide, perfect health, a cavalier who asked nothing she was not willing to give him, and hosts of friends.

She had been dining at the Cotton Tree one night in January, when the twinkling lights of a ship crept slowly up from the Palisadoes. She and Eveleigh were standing on the steps of the little landing-stage, and heard the creaking of the cable as the anchor ran out and dropped with a splash. It was pitch dark as only a moonless tropical night can be dark, and nothing of the ship was visible save the outlining, dancing lights.

"Some American yacht, isn't she, Nigel? There's one reported as coming I know."

"Can't see. Might be anything." Eveleigh turned to a man beside them, talking to a pretty woman in black. "Do *you* know what she is, Standing?"

"Mrs. Barclay ought to know." The Naval Agent, who

knew them both laughed with a twinkle behind his sleepy, grey eyes. "That's H.M.S. *Butterfly*, my dear chap."

CHAPTER XXVI

A TELEPHONE message to the house the following morning bore witness to the truth of the Naval Agent's statement. Peter was up to the eyes in work—the sub. had gone sick, confound him—and it would be impossible to leave the ship before noon, perhaps even later. However, he'd be certain to be up about three and would Joy please make a point of being at home. Also he would expect her to dine with him that night, and as the *Butterfly* would only be in port three days, on each of the two subsequent nights, and to cancel any engagements she might have made for the afternoons as well.

"Peter, I c-can't. In her panic the old, out-grown stammer tripped up her tongue for the first time for years. "I c-can't." Not possibly. I've got a-a party I simply c-can't get out of to-day. A f-formal thing. The invitation's weeks old." She lied, desperately, panic-stricken. "And you come to dinner here with me instead. We can t-talk heaps better here."

"All right." His voice came back to her over the wires, tranquil, undisturbed. "All the same I shall expect you to be in when I come this afternoon. I shall be up about three."

Frantically she rang up the Cotton Tree, was almost dancing with impatience when finally she heard Eveleigh's voice.

"Nigel, I'm in an awful hole. Can you come up here? Now? At once? I'll send the car to fetch you, if only you'll come."

She could have hugged him for the calm reassurance of his reply.

"I'll be ready when the car comes. Cheerio."

He was on the veranda in twenty minutes, cool and unruffled, listening in his silent way to the rather incoherent story she told him.

"And I simply daren't be left alone with him, Nigel. I promised his mother faithfully, and you don't know Peter. If he says a thing he does it. I don't believe it

would make a scrap of difference to Peter *whose* daughter I was, and I've got to save him from himself. You *do* understand, don't you? And I don't want him to know either. Nigel, what shall I do? He thinks I'm some one rather special. Out there at sea he's had nothing else to do, and I *don't* want him to know what I am unless I'm forced to tell him. That was my bargain with his mother. If I promised not to marry him, she promised not to tell him that I was just nobody. Do try and *think* what I'm going to do. Of course, I can go out with you to-day somewhere and stay out, and to-night you can dine here and take him away when you go, but I can't dodge him *all* the time he's here, and, Nigel, I *don't* want Peter to know what I am. I can't let him know that."

Eveleigh winced a little, realizing how little she cared how much he knew, but she never noticed his fingers tighten over his pipe stem, nor the darkening of his eyes under their level dark brows.

"There's one way, of course. Quite simple. You could be engaged to me."

"You?"

"Exactly. I'm not a beauty, I admit, but I'm not so hopelessly out of the running, physically, as to make him question your sanity."

"Nigel dear, I *didn't* mean that. But isn't it going to lead to complications? It's a splendid way out, of course. But afterwards, I mean?"

"If you're afraid I'll hold you to it, you needn't worry. It's a purely business arrangement." Eveleigh's voice was dry, non-committal. "No one except Conway need know. It's only three days after all. They'll soon go and I'm getting a fair exchange. I shall expect affection from my fiancée, you know."

"You mean that you'll have to make *love* to me?"

If her horrified tone had not rubbed into his brain so thoroughly how distasteful lovemaking from any other source save Peter's might be to her, he could almost have laughed at the dismay in her voice.

"You'll have to play up, my dear. That is, unless you want him to think you're engaged against your will, which rather defeats its own object. After all, a kiss or two won't hurt you and they'll mean quite a lot to me."

"I'm a selfish little horror, Nigel. But I didn't mean to hurt. Really I didn't. I'd forgotten about you, although that's making it worse than ever, isn't it? It does seem a good way out of the difficulty, doesn't it, and, after all, I know you so well that it would be perfectly easy and straightforward. I'd rather be kissed, if kisses are really a necessary part of the performance, by you than by anyone. Except, of course, Peter."

"I'll make them as few and far between as possible," Eveleigh said dryly. "You'd better go and get ready and come for a picnic-lunch with me somewhere. If Conway goes to the Cotton Tree, and sees you lunching alone with me, it rather gives the lie to your formal party doesn't it?"

By his side in the little two-seater, which she liked better than the bigger, more formal, touring car, she looked up at him sideways.

"I did something like this before, you know, Nigel. Pretended to be married, or rather let Stephen pretend for me, so that I shouldn't be put in an equivocal position. You know how *that* ended. The game became the real thing. You're not going to hold me to this are you?"

"Is the idea so horrible?"

She looked troubled.

"No. But I shall never marry anyone but Peter, and as I can't marry him I shan't marry at all. I made one awful hash of things, Nigel. You don't want me to make another, do you?"

"You're too irresponsible to be on your own. Incidentally you're essentially a woman who needs a man about her. I shouldn't ask much."

"I can't give you anything, my dear. Every ounce of me, body and soul, is Peter's. I've always liked him, and the night he went away I knew there'd never be anyone else. There couldn't be."

"You're twenty-four and an utter child. Are you going to spend the rest of your life living on memories?"

"Pleasant memories are better than unpleasant realities."

"You're frank at all events, aren't you? No one could accuse you of patting a man's self-conceit on the back. What about the other woman?"

"What other woman?"

"Conway's an only son. The heir to an old title and the last of his race. He'll have to marry. It's his bare duty. Are you going to eat your heart out in loneliness for a man who's married to another woman?"

He saw her wince. To hurt her made him hate himself, but he had to make things clear to her.

"I've thought of that. He's got to marry, of course. And I can't help it, Nigel. I'd love him just as much if he were married to a fat woman and had six children. He's like that. He gets a grip on you and hangs on."

"Well, why not marry me and go on loving him in theory? It'd be better than nothing for both of us."

"Dear Nigel." She took one hand off the wheel, laid it for a second over his. "You're the most unselfish person I've ever met. First you wanted to marry a girl who, for all you knew, was what she appeared to be. Now you still want to marry her, even though she's hopelessly in love with another man."

"I don't want and never have wanted to marry any abstract girl," Eveleigh said stubbornly. "I want to marry you, which is a different thing altogether. Mind that culvert, Joy. You needn't put an end to us both rather than marry me. I shan't worry you to that extent."

Peter found the veranda empty, saw Stephen on the lawn and went over to him to be greeted by a shriek of welcome.

"Hullo, shrimp. Where's your mother?"

"Gone out to lunch. Uncle Nigel fetched her."

"Who's Uncle Nigel?" Peter's voice sounded suspicious, but Stephen was too young to notice the tone and chattered on unsuspectingly.

"He's my godfather. One of them at least. He's staying here."

"In the house?"

Peter's hands shut tight. At the moment he had no definite plans in his mind. He wasn't absolutely certain, until Eveleigh's name came up, that the pleased feeling he had been nursing for months was really love. His life had been singularly free of the catch-as-catch-can love affairs, that make up the lives of most men of his age, and at twenty-five he was extraordinarily young and inexperienced. He'd kissed girls before, of course. Lots of girls. Every

fellow did. A great many who'd expected to be kissed and quite a number because it seemed the obvious thing to do. A few because he'd wanted to, but none of them left more than a fleeting memory behind, and certainly the kisses of none of them had sent the blood hammering through his veins as those snatched kisses under the shadow of the Mayagonga gate. Even now, nearly a year afterwards, he could remember exactly how things had swung round him, when he started-up the car and ran down the mountain side. He'd nearly had a smash round one corner. Clean forgotten the landslide Joy had pointed out to him coming up, and of which she'd reminded him just before he left, in the memory of her fresh cool lips and startled, starry eyes. And all her letters? They'd never mentioned anyone named Nigel. He knew suddenly that he hated this unknown Nigel, hated every man who was with Joy, or could bask in her friendship, when he had to be away from her. The thought of Joy with the wretched Nigel made him see red. It was unthinkable. Joy and some person he'd never met or heard of! A complete stranger and *his* girl! He pulled himself up short. *That* was it, of course. Fool that he'd been not to know it before. She was *his* girl and she'd no earthly right to be gallivanting with other men in his absence. She was his and he meant to keep her in defiance of Nigel, or any other man in the world. She knew that she was his, of course, so there was still less excuse for Nigel and his undesirable attentions. He realized now that everything he'd said in all those letters had been written for the express purpose of impressing that fact on her mind. The same applied to her letters, of course. All the little trifles of memories they'd tossed backwards and forwards in their correspondence, all pointed to one thing. He was hers just as indubitably as she was his, and had always been his from the very beginning of things. But if she was his and knew it, why *Nigel*, whoever he might be? And a party with him which she couldn't put off? Why Nigel at all for that matter? He—Peter—would have wriggled out of an audience with the King himself, rather than not be on hand when she came home, if *she'd* been away ten months. What had begun by being vague irritation against the unknown Nigel, for his mere existence, deepened into certain

and very definite wrath, finally into sheer, undiluted panic. Suppose she *hadn't* understood the letters. They were perfectly clear, of course. But suppose for the sake of argument that she'd just taken them at their face value. Suppose it had never struck her that he worshipped the ground she walked on, and wanted to murder every other fool who dared to look at her. Suppose——

Stephen's voice broke through the maze of his whirling thoughts.

"Have you got a pain, Peter? You're scowling something horrible."

"Sorry, old chap. Where's your mother gone? And when's she coming back?"

"I don't know. P'raps Robin does. When she goes out with Uncle Nigel in the car she very often doesn't get back till just 'fore dinner. Time to change, you know."

Nigel again. For ever and always, Nigel. Once he got hold of Nigel he'd teach him to keep his hands off other men's property. And teach Joy, too, that he'd stand no nonsense of that sort. It wasn't his fault that he couldn't hang round her and be at her beck and call every hour of every day, like this fool Nigel, who, apparently, had nothing else to do than to make a nuisance of himself. She knew perfectly well that only the rotten Service kept him hopping from one end of the world to the other. He'd have to chuck it, of course. She was a good deal too attractive to leave ashore alone. And lonely, probably. Poor little kid. After all she had to go out now and then, and she hadn't known he was coming.

His blind, unreasoning rage cooled before the consoling remembrance that he'd turned up when she'd certainly had no reasons to expect him, and that there were certain social obligations—especially in a pokey little place like Fijama—which you couldn't get out of without causing a lot of comment and gossip. Besides, when he'd had a talk with her, explained things properly and they'd hung over the counter of the only decent jeweller's shop in the town, and chosen her engagement ring, things would be quite different. After all, it had been a bit vague. And Joy wasn't the sort to run after a man or wear her heart on her sleeve. The very reverse in fact. Her independence was one of her charms. That and her little air of dignified aloofness.

It was a perfectly contented Peter who had tea with Stephen and Robin under the shade of the lignumvitae tree, and afterwards taught a new and wonderfully enticing game of Patience to an apt, absorbed pupil; and it was Peter, in just the same placidly contented frame of mind, who went to meet the little car when it turned in at the drive gates just before half-past six. It was growing dusk in the rapid way it does grow dusk in Fijama, rather as though Nature had no time to waste on changing her clothes, and scorned the tea-gown hour, between the sunshine of her day garments and the heavy, black velvet of her night attire.

He could just see Joy, slim and straight at the wheel, in her white gown, her face hidden below her drooping hat brim, and hear her gay little voice.

"Oh, Nigel, what a heavenly day it's been."

And then the hated Nigel, in a tone that sent every drop of blood racing out of his cheeks, and made him bite his lips to stem the racing torrent of furious wrath that nearly choked him.

"It's only the first time of many, my darling."

CHAPTER XXVII

HE spent an utterly miserable evening listening to Joy's feverish babble of commonplaces, and watching Eveleigh smoke his interminable cigarettes, and left early with the firm determination that he would never come back. It was the first real set-back in all his happy, easy-going life, and he took it badly. He could have cheerfully shot Eveleigh, sitting snugly at Joy's side on the big, swinging hammock seat, while he, himself, suffered the tortures of the damned opposite. Somehow, the fact of Joy loving and being loved by any other man, had never entered his head since the night he had kissed her by the Mayagonga gate. He had taken her so thoroughly for granted. Fool—worse than fool that he had been. But it only showed you that you could never trust a woman further than you could see her. He could have sworn that the kisses Joy had given him back that night were genuine. And she'd probably given the same sort of kisses to half a dozen other men, and Nigel amongst them.

He went back to the ship, swearing savagely that he would never see her again, and was on the veranda directly he came off duty next day. To his own annoyance he found himself begging her to dine with him, and, because she hesitated, with an eye on Eveleigh, included Eveleigh himself in the invitation, and spent a second evening, slightly worse than the first.

Even Nigel Eveleigh could almost have been deceived by the perfection of Joy's acting, if he hadn't seen her the night before, after Peter with an abrupt, hurt "Good night, Joy—'Night, Eveleigh," strode down the drive and out of sight. She had stood quite still, at the head of the steps, watching him disappearing into the darkness and then had turned, felt her way with both hands blindly, gropingly into the house, and left him on the veranda without a word. Half an hour later she came back.

"I'm sorry to be such a fool, Nigel. You've been so good to me. I wonder if I can really keep it up until he goes. I never thought it would hurt so hideously."

"I don't know why the devil you made such a fool promise." Eveleigh's voice was grim. The traces of tears on her cheeks cut him like a knife. "What the hell does anything matter if you love him and he loves you? It's a ridiculous argument."

"Lady Heriot doesn't see things like that. She says that Peter's wife must be above suspicion, and I'm not, you see. I could bear it better if he understood. It's seeing him think that I don't care that it's so hard. His eyes made me want to kiss the pain out of them. They looked like those of a puppy you've smacked hard for snapping, when he only meant it in fun, to show how much he loved you." She shivered. "I shall never forget his eyes as long as I live."

"Why in Heaven's name don't you tell him?"

"I daren't. I'm afraid. I don't believe really that it would make a scrap of difference, but I couldn't bear to watch him try to back out if it did, Nigel, or go through with it, grinning, knowing all the time that he was letting the family down, and suffering miseries rather than let me see he minded. I *know* that for himself he wouldn't mind. It's the family. They're so proud of their name, and I'd suffer anything rather than see his opinion of me change."

But Peter didn't see her then, neither did he know that every scrap of her so longed for the touch of his lips, that she could neither sleep nor eat. All he saw was a vividly-alive little person, feverishly gay, never still, presumably engaged to the abhorred Nigel, and he was hideously, unutterably miserable.

They all dined together at the Country Club on his last night in port—not in the least because he wanted to dine with her and Eveleigh, but because he couldn't keep away from her—with Freda Kavanagh, the Governor's young daughter, making up a fourth, and after dinner they danced to the crashing chords of a native jazz band. Outside the ball-room the air hung heavy and sultry, despite the time of year, a threatened storm making it stuffy and hot. Beyond the hills—the Gonga Mountains, Peter recognized dully—the pink and mauve and blue sheet lightning flickered incessantly The whole atmosphere was pregnant with electricity. Every one felt it; was oddly keyed up to a higher pitch than usual of feverish excitement. Peter danced automatically with the little Kavanagh girl, who openly admired him, answering when he was spoken to without even taking the trouble to listen very carefully to what she was saying. She thought it a pity that anyone so nice to look at and who danced so well, could be so dull between dances. He couldn't tell her, of course, that he didn't want either to dance with her or talk to her or be talked to by anyone, and that he grudged every moment that took him away from Joy, and she wasn't really sorry when the car from Government House came to fetch her, a little earlier than arranged because of the threatened storm.

Peter took her to the car, tucked her in, stood, as in duty bound, watching till it turned the corner. Then he went back to Joy, sitting demurely by Eveleigh's side amongst the palms of the black-and-white tiled veranda. Eveleigh didn't dance, couldn't on account of his leg; and Peter and she had only danced twice together. Colourless, expressionless dances when his arm had held her gingerly and her hand had barely touched his. The band was just starting again.

"Dance this with me before I go, Joy. We're off tomorrow and I must get back to the ship."

She got up without a word, stiffened her body so that he might not feel the quiver that ran through her at the touch of his arm, swung with him out across the polished floor. He danced well, and the floor was not too crowded, but before the band stopped he pulled up by one of the big open windows and went out into the heavy, scented night, her hand through his arm.

"It's too hot to dance. Come to the end of the grounds and back. There's something queer the matter with the air, isn't there?"

"A storm coming, I think?" She tried to keep her voice steady. She *must* play up now. The time was nearly up. "It's been stuffy all day."

They went in silence to the edge of the lawn, found a bench under a waving cocoa-nut palm out of sight of the gay little crowd, and sat down without speaking. A mango tree stood out grim and shadowy twenty yards away, hiding them from curious eyes. There was no one within sight or sound. Nothing to break the heavy, almost tangible, silence save the splash of the water in the fountain just behind them, and the band crashing to a triumphant finish in the distance.

"Are you really sailing to-morrow, Peter?"

She knew he was, asked the question merely for the sake of saying something, and because the silence was getting unbearable.

"At ten in the morning. We shan't come here again." A little silver-blue sliver of lightning cut through the darkness, replacing the scintillating sheets of pink and mauve, followed by a growl of distant thunder. "There's the storm starting. Our commission here's up next July."

"Where shall you go next?"

"Heaven knows." He shrugged his shoulders. "I don't really mind very much. All pretty much alike to us, you know. The usual sort of thing wherever we go. Dances and tennis and a hectic flirtation or two. Every port's pretty well the same." He wanted to hurt her, rouse her from her little air of cool indifference, knew he had done it when he saw the colour creep into her cheeks and die away again, leaving them very white. "Here to-day and gone to-morrow. Very nice while it lasts, of course, but it doesn't leave much impression."

A more vivid streak of lightning than the first made her blink, but she stared steadily in front of her, wondering if he remembered the storm that had first given them to each other. He was remembering the very same thing, had she been able to see into his misery-racked brain.

"I suppose even variety bores after a time. It's been awfully nice to have seen you, Peter. I'm sorry it's all been so short. Shall we go back?"

He stood up beside her, touched her arm.

"Just a minute, Joy. I want to say something—wish you luck and all that. I'm a rotten hand at makin' speeches, but I hope you'll be as happy as you deserve to be, and that's sayin' a lot. I'm sure Eveleigh's a damned good sort, and he probably knows his luck as——"

There was a sudden blinding flash, a deafening simultaneous roar and, where the mango tree had stood, a heap of charred fragments. Somewhere a woman screamed shrilly, hysterically. The whole earth rocked and shook and echoed with the detonation, and when the sound died away she was in his arms, his lips against her mouth while he muttered incoherently and recklessly.

"I'll never let him have you. You're mine. You've always been mine. Joy, dearest, best of all, you know you belong to me, don't you? All these years from the very beginning there's been no one else for either of us—no one that mattered. How can you be his when you were mine first—when you've always been mine? Joy, let me see your eyes. You know I love you, don't you? That I've always loved you just as you love me? You can't deny it. You can't look me straight in the eyes and say you *don't* love me."

For one mad, glad moment she clung to him, giving him back kiss for kiss, all her soul on her lips, and in her eyes and then she wrenched herself out of his arms.

"Oh, go, Peter. Please go. I must be mad. I've given my word. I can't marry you. Please go."

"Why can't you?"

"I've promised. I gave my word of honour. I shan't ever change and I don't love you like that. Really I don't. I—just lost my head. It's the storm—and the shock—anything. I *don't* love you, Peter. I must have been mad—quite mad. Let me go, Peter, and forgive me.

Please forgive me. I didn't mean to be wilfully unkind. Say good-bye and go."

She held out her hand, but instead he took her again in his arms, holding her lightly. Her head barely reached his shoulder and he tilted her chin until he could see her eyes under the curly halo of her hair.

"You don't really believe this is good-bye, do you? You can't look me in the face and tell me you want this to be the end of it all? Never to see me again?"

"What I *want* has nothing to do with it. It's *got* to be the end, Peter. I—I don't love you like that. Please go."

"I am goin' when I've said what I've got to say. You're lyin', Joy. I don't know why or for what reason, but you are. This is not the end and you know it. The end won't be until one or other of us is dead and not then, please God. I've never owned up to bein' beaten and I'm not beaten now. If there's a barrier I'll break it down, but you're mine and I'll have you. By every law of nature you're mine as surely as I'm yours now and for all time. You can lie till the end of time but your eyes can't and your kisses didn't." He laughed triumphantly. "When you kissed me just now you kissed the man you loved, same as I kissed the only woman who's ever mattered. I don't know what the barrier is and I don't care. Whatever it is I'll find it and I'll break it, as I'll break every damned thing that tries to come between you and me. You can go now, if you want to, but I'm not beaten and what's more I won't *be* beaten by anyone or anything. Do you understand?"

"Yes. Take me home, Peter. Please take me home."

It wasn't until, tired of waiting and conscious of the gradually diminishing crowd, Eveleigh went to look for them that he found they'd gone home and forgotten his bare existence.

CHAPTER XXVIII

AT the beginning of the hot weather she took Stephen home to England. Grey Towers and the house in Scotland were both let and even had they not been, neither of them appealed to her.

They stayed in town for a month or so and then went to a big old rambling place she leased for a year on the borders of Sussex and Hampshire, where Stephen could see the sea from his nursery windows and the stately ships that passed in a steady stream up and down the channel. She bought him a telescope and he sat for hours on the window-seat, absolutely happy with a coloured sheet of all the flags of different shipping lines, comparing them with the flags that fluttered at the distant mast-heads.

On Halliday's advice she got a tutor for him, a big, ugly young Scotchman who by means of a humour which he displayed to no one else in the house, kept the child in shrieks of laughter that did Joy good to hear.

Peter's letters came as regularly as ever with no pretence now as to their meaning or character, and that in spite of the rigid impersonality of her replies. They were frankly and unashamedly love letters, sent the colour racing into her cheeks and made a little pulse hammer crazily at the base of her throat. She kept them, every one, in little tidy heaps, dated and tied with ribbon, answered them punctually and regularly, writing long friendly letters as she had always done and refusing definitely to be drawn into any admission of anything deeper.

On the whole she was very happy. She made friends easily, and people liked her as much for herself and her own gay personality as for her money, which was a feather in her cap.

She met Lady Heriot once when, going up to town on a shopping expedition, they ran into each other in the foyer of the hotel where they were both staying. Peter's mother looked older, much older, and rather frail, Joy thought. Not very happy. They lunched together and the cause soon came out. Not Peter this time, but Netta—dainty, beautiful, headstrong Netta. She was horribly unhappy with a husband who both gambled and drank and did neither decently nor even in decent company. Lady Heriot was glad to find some one to whom she could talk frankly, and she was really fond of Joy—really sorry that her birth prevented her from marrying Peter. She looked at the gay little face at the opposite side of the table, listened to the soft, sympathetic little voice, thought of Peter who refused to settle down and get married, and sighed.

"Peter says he saw you, Joy. He's at home for a week."

"He came to Fijama in January." Joy looked Peter's mother straight between the eyes. "I kept my promise, Lady Heriot. He asked me to marry him and I refused. I lied, too. I told him I didn't love him."

"He told me. He asked me if I knew why you refused him. He didn't believe the lie, you see."

"Did you tell him?"

"My dear, you're not the only person who can keep a promise. Ours was a mutual agreement."

"Forgive me, Lady Heriot." Joy flushed a little. "I ought to have known that, of course, but—— Shall we leave Peter out of the conversation? Tell me more about your daughter. Did you say she was at Southsea?"

"They have a house there. From what I can gather it is little better than a gambling den. We wanted Netta to come home, but she's stubborn like Peter. They inherit it from the Heriots and from me, and she says that as she's made her bed so she will lie on it."

"I'm only nine miles from Southsea. I wonder if she'd come and see me."

"You're a very forgiving woman, Joy, my dear. You don't bear us any grudge, do you?"

"Why should I? You did what you thought right. You've a perfect right to your own opinions. I don't think they're right and I hated you the night I sent Peter away." She laughed, though there were tears in her voice. "It's funny how Peter crops up every time, isn't it? If you'll tell Mrs. Corday where I am, I'd love to see her. I've heard so much of her."

"I'll send her your address to-morrow. I'm glad I met you, Joy, my dear. You know, don't you, that if things had been different, there's no one I should have welcomed so warmly for Peter's wife."

Joy got up, holding out her hand. Her eyes had recovered their brightness.

"I said that I wouldn't marry him until you asked me yourself, Lady Heriot. You're not absolutely rid of me yet."

Netta Corday came over to lunch a week later, a younger edition of her mother, vivid, tawny-gold curls, dead-white skin, eyes that were neither blue nor grey nor green, but

were a mixture of all three, and a mutinous mouth that showed the dogged Heriot will. She brought an elaborately uniformed nurse with her and a baby—a little girl with hair the colour of golden corn and Peter's sunny blue eyes.

"You've a kiddie of your own and I knew you wouldn't mind." She had a throaty little voice, husky and sweet. "Mother says you're quite crazy about children and I hardly ever leave baby at home if I go away for long. My husband hates children, and even the best of them cry sometimes."

Joy heard the bitter note in her voice as she sent the nurse and baby to the nursery which Stephen had exchanged for the more grown-up schoolroom. Robin adored babies, and Robin was rather at a loose end these days, when the big young Scotchman absorbed so much of Stephen's time.

"I'm awfully glad you came. I've heard so much of you. From Lady Heriot and from Peter. Your brother and I are old friends."

Netta looked at her shrewdly.

"Weren't you the girl Peter used to tag after when he came home after typhoid? He told me about you. And then mother met you in Fijama. I went there once for a trip. You live there, don't you?"

"I've got a house there. I don't live anywhere definitely at present, and my plans are uncertain. My boy's not frightfully strong and a good deal depends on how he stands this climate."

"Funny that all of us get something. You've got a delicate boy, I've got a husband who, as probably mother told you, since it's the topic uppermost in her mind at present, is little better than a cardsharper, and Peter's in love with a girl who won't look at him. Poor old Peter. It's rough luck when you think what lots of girls there are who'd give their ears to catch him." She broke off, eyed Joy curiously. "You weren't the girl by any chance, were you?"

Joy felt the colour creeping into her cheeks.

"What makes you think it was I? He must have met hundreds of girls."

Netta nodded her head slowly.

"Instinct, I suppose. Why don't you marry him? He's one of the very best."

"I know he is. But there's an excellent reason why I shouldn't."

"Which is tantamount to telling me to mind my own business. But next to baby, Peter's probably the thing I love best in the world and he's horribly unhappy."

"Did he say so?"

"Peter never gives the show away. He's like me. We grin when things hurt. It's a family failing and a great mistake, because nobody ever believes things are wrong. Take me, for example. You wouldn't think to look at me that I hadn't a peaceful second in my life, would you? I live in hourly terror of my husband being run in by the police for keeping a gambling-den, but I don't look it. I flatter myself that there isn't a more indifferent-looking woman in England than I am and yet I shiver every time the door-bell rings."

"Why don't you go home?"

"And admit that daddy and mother were right. I'm a Heriot, my dear girl. We never own up that we're beaten even when we know it. Peter won't give *you* up without a struggle, you know. I married Jocelyn of my own free will and I'll abide by what I've done. It's the least I can do when all's said and done. By the way, didn't Peter say you'd met him? I'm sure he wrote something of the sort from Fijama."

"I only met him twice. Years ago. I don't think he'd even remember me. I was an extraordinarily unentertaining specimen."

Netta got up to go.

"You've changed, then. I can understand your attraction for Peter. I like you, and we always like the same things and people, bar Jocelyn, and even I share Peter's opinion of Jocelyn now. I won't ask you to come over and see me, because you won't at all care for the type of people you're more than likely to meet at our house, but I'll come here again if you don't mind. It's done me good. I'm sorry you won't marry Peter, though, knowing him, I shan't give up hope. I'd have liked you for a sister-in-law."

Joy liked her frank outspokenness and the courage with which she faced life. Liked, too, the hint of Peter's dogged personality that underlay the dainty white and gold surface,

and her invitation to come again was cordial and she meant it, though she little thought when she gave it what was to be the result of her friendship with Jocelyn Corday's wife.

She and Peter met once in the week he spent in England, an evening snatched from a hectic leave. His godfather, Admiral Sinclair, just appointed to the Pacific station, wanted him as his flag lieutenant and, by dint of pulling a few necessary wires, got him, though Peter would have liked a little longer in England, and a few more glimpses of Joy herself. She came up specially from Hampshire on receipt of his telegram, dined with him and finished off the evening with the latest revue and supper at the Savoy. Neither of them alluded to the night at the Country Club or to Eveleigh, back at his job with McInnis in the South Sea Islands. They met in the foyer of the restaurant where they had arranged to dine, and but for the new note of possession in his voice and something in his eyes as he greeted her which had not been there before, all that had happened on his last night in Fijama might have been a dream. His manner was what it had always been until the day when he found Eveleigh in possession of what he regarded as his property, devoid of anything approaching sentiment, the attitude of any decently-bred man towards a woman he likes and admires. But for that note of possession, a vague, barely perceptible hint of authority, she could almost have thought herself back at Mayagonga with things as they were before she had driven him to the white gate, and it was not until he was taking her to her hotel that she knew the dream to be sheer reality and no dream at all.

Under cover of the darkness of the taxi he slipped an arm round her and kissed her, not the snatched kisses of a man uncertain of his ground, but the quiet, deliberate kisses of an acknowledged, accepted lover.

"Those are the hall-marks of your rightful owner, Joy." He spoke quietly, but she could feel his heart thumping. "I don't think you'll try forgettin' me again, but that's by way of precaution. I'm goin' away for two years and I can't afford to take chances."

"It's all wrong, Peter. I shan't ever marry you. I don't even love you, and I've promised. You ought to

know that I can't go back on my word of honour. It would be different almost if I loved you."

He laughed softly, his lips against her hair.

"Dear little liar. That doesn't go down, you know. I haven't forgotten the night at the Country Club, and I don't think you have, either. As I said then, I don't know what rubbishy promise you made, or why you made it. I don't even care. You'd be mine in spite of all the drivellin' promises of all the silly women in the world put together. Don't you know that for yourself?"

She said "yes" meekly, thankful for the proverb which says sufficient unto the day is the evil. The wonder of Peter's kisses still left her rather weak and shaken, incapable of thinking very deeply or worrying very much about anything more than that he loved her. Fortunately his mother hadn't barred kisses, and marriage didn't trouble her very much as long as Peter's arms were round her and Peter's lips against hers.

He was booked to join his ship at Plymouth three days later—to sail any time within the ensuing week.

"I'll wire the day I leave." He kissed her for the last time as the taxi skidded to a standstill under the blazing lights of her hotel. "If there's an earthly chance of seein' you again before I go I shall take it, of course. But it's doubtful. It'll probably be two years before I'm home. By that time you'll perhaps have decided when you're goin' to marry me and give up talkin' for the sake of talkin'. Meantime you'll write every mail, of course."

She said "yes" again, partly because she meant it, chiefly because under the compelling light of Peter's blue eyes, there was nothing else she could say. He held her hand hard for a second, stooped swiftly as the commissionaire turned his back tactfully for the purpose of picking up an entirely imaginary piece of orange-skin on the immaculate door-mat and kissed her fingers as they lay crushed in his, then swung on his heel and jumped into the waiting taxi.

She was reading to Stephen in the garden a week later when a big car, grey with dust, flashed in at the gate and raced up the drive. She dropped the book with the colour coming and going in her cheeks. Peter'd got leave, then—managed it somehow. Dear Peter! He would, of

course. It was just the sort of thing he would do. Put up with the discomfort of a five-hour motor run each way for the sake of an hour with her. Stephen's protesting "I say, Mummie, never mind the rotten car—Finish the story," passed unheeded for once, as she went across the lawn to where the car was just pulling up at the front door.

But the man who got out was not Peter. It was an old man with very straight, square shoulders and steely-grey eyes under heavy, white brows, who looked horribly anxious and worried.

She stood still, feeling suddenly sick and dizzy. Then said one word, under her breath.

"Peter?"

Lord Heriot took both her quivering, ice-cold, little hands in his, holding them fast. His voice was not quite steady as he spoke to her.

"I've come to fetch you, Joy, my dear, if you'll come," he said gently. "Peter's dyin' and he wants you."

CHAPTER XXIX

IN the car, twenty minutes later, she asked the questions she had not stopped to ask in the rush of getting away as quickly as possible.

"Pneumonia," the old man said unsteadily. "And not a shadow of chance, the doctors say. He went out for a round of golf the day after he joined his ship, got wet and didn't bother to change until too late. He was busy the next day and, when he felt seedy, hadn't time to think about it much. Thought it was a cold and took no notice. He went down with pneumonia two days ago and they sent for his mother and me. Netta's in Italy. Went yesterday before she got the news. He was askin' for you all night and again this mornin'. So I came myself to be sure of gettin' you."

"You needn't have done that. A wire would have brought me."

He found her hand, held it between both his.

"I couldn't take chances, my dear, and you've no reason to do us favours."

"I wasn't thinking of you. I meant Peter. I'd go to the end of the world for him if he wanted me. Whatever anyone else had said or done. Besides, I don't bear you or Lady Heriot any grudge. You only did what you thought was right. Are you sure there's no hope?"

"None, the doctors say. It went harder with him after bein' in a hot climate for so long. They've taken him ashore to the hospital and he's unconscious most of the time. They gave him twenty-four hours this mornin'. All the time he's conscious he's askin' for you. It's a nasty knock, Joy. He's my only son and the last of the family."

They scarcely spoke after that, both busy with their own thoughts, sitting hand in hand in the big car as it raced westward through the sleepy villages and coastside towns. To Joy, remembering Peter as she had seen him a week earlier, it seemed impossible to picture him ill—worse than ill—dying. He was so full of vitality, so extraordinarily alive. She tried to think of him lying in bed, helpless, and failed hopelessly. As they got nearer and the lights of Plymouth flickered through the gathering dusk she found herself shivering, although the evening was hot and stuffy, felt sick and dizzy. Up there on the hill was the hospital. Lord Heriot pointed it out to her with a shaking finger. Its lights blinked bravely, cheerfully, through trees, and yet behind its walls, in one of those bravely-lighted rooms, Peter lay dying. It was wrong for everywhere to be so bright and cheerful. Nothing should be cheerful in a world that Peter was so soon to leave. Her fingers, icy-cold, tightened over Heriot's. She wasn't used to sickness—had never seen Death. She wanted to stop the car, to shriek that she couldn't, *wouldn't*, go amongst those callously-cheerful lights and watch Peter die. Peter who, out of all the world, made life worth living. But her lips wouldn't frame the words and the car crept nearer with horrible persistency. She tried to get up but her knees quivered and shook until she couldn't stand and then, almost before she realized that they had stopped, she heard Lady Heriot's voice beside her, saw a nurse, all stiff blue and white linen and starch, waiting on the steps leading into the big, cheerful entrance hall.

Dimly Lady Heriot's voice, deadly weary, reached her, talking to her husband.

"He's alive, Bill. There's no change except that he's a little weaker." Then to herself: "It's good of you to come, Joy."

She found her voice at last, heard herself speaking as though from a great distance.

"You knew I should come. Can I go to him now?"

"He's unconscious."

"I want to be there if he wakes."

Lady Heriot spoke to the nurse, and still as though she were watching a scene in which she was a mere spectator, Joy felt her arm guided by a firm, capable hand into a room along a corridor and heard a voice crisp, clear, authoritative, giving orders, realized dully that she was expected to obey them.

"You must drink that coffee first, Mrs. Barclay, please, and eat the sandwiches. You've had a long journey and we can't run the risk of your fainting or making a scene."

She obeyed dumbly, ate something that tasted like sawdust, sipped coffee that was nice and hot and then plunged her face into a basin of water. The food and the cold water steadied her whirling brain. She smiled bravely at the blue and white figure watching her.

"I'm all right now, Sister. You needn't be afraid. I never faint or anything like that."

The sister laid a hand on her arm.

"He's changed, you know. You're prepared for that, aren't you? Even three days makes a difference."

"Yes. Please let me go to him."

The woman looked at her closely, then led the way along clean, white corridors smelling faintly of disinfectant, past countless doors all alike, some of them shut, some of them propped open. In one of the rooms a boy with a cheerful, impudent face sat in a chair by the window with one arm in a sling. In another a man lay very still with his head swathed in bandages, and in a third two youngsters together, one on crutches, the other with the white, tired face of a convalescent, giggled and grinned together over an illustrated paper propped on a table between them.

The sister stopped at last, her hand on the knob of a door exactly like any of the others.

"You'll be careful, Mrs. Barclay."

"Yes. I can be trusted," Joy said steadily, and the

elder woman stood aside, signalled to a nurse sitting by the side of a bed between the window and the door, and shut the door again.

The nurse got up to make room for her and she went without faltering, straight to where Peter lay. He was almost unrecognizable under the three-days' growth of stubble round his dogged, square chin, and his face had a horrible leaden tinge, like that of some one already dead. They had brushed his hair differently, too, parting it, whereas Peter brushed it straight back; and his eyes were shut, with great black circles round them. But for his heavy, tortured breathing he might have been dead already. Joy heard him gasping for breath almost before the door closed and the hideous, choking rattle terrified her, though she would have died sooner than show her fear.

"He is quite unconscious." The nurse touched her arm. "You'd better sit here. He may rouse again, but I don't think it's likely."

"Will it be—long?"

"Six or seven hours, probably. Early morning's the test." She spoke with the stoical indifference of one who faces Death daily, calmly unafraid. "The vitality drops then. Shall I get you something to eat?"

"I've had some sandwiches. I'm quite all right."

She touched Peter's hand as it lay on the white coverlet, brown and freckled, the only familiar thing about him, lifted it and held it between her own. It rested heavily on hers and was cold—horribly cold and damp, and she stooped, laying her lips, warm and pulsing with life, against the freckles she loved almost more than anything else about him.

She didn't know how long she sat there. Once or twice the nurse came across to the bed from her place by the fireplace, with a little instrument like an hourglass in her hand, holding it upright while she laid her fingers on the wrist of Peter's other hand. Once, after what seemed an eternity of waiting, a man in uniform with the red stripe of a naval surgeon amongst the gold on his cuffs and shoulder-straps came and looked down at the boy in the little narrow bed, shook his head, then turned back and looked at her closely. His face was vaguely familiar.

"Didn't Conway bring you to lunch in the ward-room of the *Waterwing* one day?" He had a nice voice, a deep

baritone with a faint Scotch burr. "I'm sure it was you. Funny I never remember hearing of his wedding."

"I'm not his wife." She looked up steadily. "We're friends, that's all. I remember you, too, though it's years ago. You sat opposite and they called you 'Scalps.'"

His eyes travelled from her white, strained face to the wedding-ring on the hand that held Peter's, drew his own conclusions and, because he was a man of the world and had a great sympathy with its weaknesses, he smiled kindly at her.

"They still do. This is a rotten business. Poor old Conway."

"Isn't there any hope?"

"There's always hope, dear lady. It's the last thing we lose. But in this case it's a frail thread, I'm afraid."

Peter stirred restlessly and the doctor went back to the bed-side, laying strong competent fingers over the listless wrist. Listening breathlessly, watching his every movement, Joy saw the boy's lips move, leant closer, straining to catch the first whispered word.

"Where's Joy, Mother? She'll come if you ask her."

Across the bed her eyes met those of the doctor, and she stooped closer.

"I'm here, Peter."

Slowly the heavy lids lifted. It seemed too great an effort for him to open his eyes at all, and when at last he did open them they were deadly tired and dark with pain. The doctor came a step nearer, said something in an undertone to the nurse, standing incuriously beside the fireplace.

"Is that you, Joy?"

"You knew I'd come, didn't you, Peter?"

"Of course." She could have wept at the supreme confidence of his voice, so pitifully weak, almost inaudible, yet so absolutely sure of her; and the nurse brought something in a spoon, handing it to the doctor.

"Drink this, Connie."

A flicker of a smile touched Conway's bloodless lips.

"Hullo, Scalps."

"Drink it, my son."

He slipped an arm below the boy's fair head, poured the liquid in the spoon between his lips, laid him down as gently as any woman.

"Don't go, Joy."

"I'm not going. I'll stay till you're quite better, Peter."

The doctor by the nurse's side muttered, "She won't have to wait long, poor little soul," came back to the bed, his fingers again on the boy's almost pulseless wrist.

"It was a lie, wasn't it, Joy? Don't bother about Scalps. He doesn't matter. You do love me, don't you?"

She answered him bravely, clearly, through lips that it took every ounce of her self-control to keep steady.

"I've always loved you, Peter. Right from the very beginning."

The doctor leant forward, a puzzled expression in his eyes.

"Is that the truth? You're not sayin' it because they've told you I'm dying and it's the easiest way? It *is* the truth, isn't it?"

"It *is* the truth, Peter. I swear to you that it's the truth."

"Then what's the fuss about? As long as you love me, nothin' matters, and no one can come in between. Kiss me."

She stooped forward, laid her lips against his and kissed him frankly and unashamedly, and suddenly a hint of the twinkle came back to Peter's tired, weary eyes, as he looked up at the doctor, still watching him with that same puzzled expression.

"Jealous, Scalps?" he said weakly, then shut his eyes and lay very still.

Over the bed Joy's terrified eyes met the doctor's steady grey ones.

"Is that the—end?" Her stiff lips scarcely moved, and the doctor laid Peter's hand back on the coverlet and came over to her side.

"I rather *think*," he said very kindly. "It's too soon to be sure about anything yet—but I rather *think* it's the beginning, my dear."

CHAPTER XXX

THE day Peter was allowed to sit up for the first time Joy went to Lady Heriot in her room at the Hotel overlooking the harbour. They had left the hospital the day he was pronounced out of danger and were all staying together until he was so much better that there was no longer any necessity for them to stay there at all. She had been sitting with Peter all afternoon, a gaunt, haggard edition certainly of the Peter she knew, but nevertheless a Peter who was very much alive and was daily growing stronger.

"Can you spare me ten minutes, Lady Heriot? Before Lord Heriot comes back."

Peter's mother pulled up a chair to the open window. Over the sea the sun was just setting, a ball of glowing crimson and gold, painting the sea crimson, too, and touching with wonderful fingers the grim lines of two cruisers anchored below them in the harbour.

"Come in, Joy dear. I saw you coming back from the hospital."

"Peter has just been sent back to bed. He's to get up to lunch to-morrow. He'll be almost himself in a week, Lady Heriot, except that he'll have to be careful for months. Not to take cold or get overheated or anything. The doctors say he's got a splendid constitution or he couldn't possibly have recovered. But it isn't about Peter that I wanted to see you. At least not directly. It's about myself. I'm going away to-morrow."

Lady Heriot hated and despised herself as she had never done before for the awful relief that surged into her heart. She struggled to keep it out of her eyes, but a little of it eluded her grasp and Joy saw it, wincing.

"I'm too grateful to hold you to your promise any longer, Joy, my dear. Peter loves you. If you will marry him, we—his father and I—will be quite content. You have rendered us a service we can never repay."

"I'm afraid that isn't enough, Lady Heriot. You remember our bargain and what I said afterwards. I shall never marry Peter until you ask me." She spoke quite quietly without any bitterness. "I didn't come

here on your account. I want to be quite fair and straight with you. I came for Peter's sake, because he wanted me, and for my own because I had to see him again. I'm glad I helped you, but I didn't come here for that purpose. You don't owe me anything at all. Whatever I did, I did entirely for my own gratification and because Peter wanted me. That's all. You can't look me in the face and say that you *want* me to marry Peter."

"You are making it terribly hard for me, Joy. Isn't it enough if I say that we are both willing that you should?"

"No. I won't marry him and be tolerated because you fancy that you owe me a debt which you can liquidate by allowing Peter to marry me. I may not be a Heriot, but I'm proud, too, Lady Heriot. I won't be Peter's wife on sufferance. That's why I'm going away. You can explain to Peter as you like, but I hold you to your bargain, just as I'm keeping mine. That's understood, isn't it?"

"What am I to tell him?"

"You must tell him what you think best."

"He will be horribly upset."

"I can't help it. Either you ask me to marry him or I leave you to explain as best you can. I can't go on like this any longer. It is torturing me."

"I—can't *ask* you, Joy."

"I know you can't. You put Peter's family before his happiness and only you yourself know whether or not you are right. I believe you are really doing what you think to be right—what your conscience, as the mother of the last of the Heriots, tells you to do. From every other point of view you are wrong. If you loved Peter as I do, his happiness would be all that counted with you. But you don't. You love the honour of the Heriots more than you love Peter, and for that reason I'm going. I don't bear you any malice, Lady Heriot. You're Peter's mother and you're doing what you believe is the best thing for Peter, and that's enough for me. More than enough. If the day ever comes when you can, on your honour, ask me to be Peter's wife, I shall marry him. Till then I shall go on loving him just the same. I shall never marry anyone else and I don't think he will either. I'm glad you sent for me and I'm glad I came. It's been a wonderful fort-

night. I've had more happiness in these last fourteen days than most women get in a lifetime and I can wait. As long as I've got Peter's love I don't care a hoot about anything else."

"Will you tell him the truth and leave him to judge?"

"No. In the first place he's not in a condition to reason things out rationally. In the second, he's in love with me. And there's a third reason, too, Lady Heriot, though I have no right even to think him capable of such a thing, knowing him as I do. I'm afraid. You were right when you said that he talked of being proud of his name and his family. He is. I am almost certain that, proud as he is of being a Heriot, he is prouder of the fact that I love him, but in case that isn't so, I daren't risk it. I'd rather have his love and respect at a distance than tell him the truth and marry him and possibly lose him. You see, it isn't as though he had only himself and his own opinions to fight against. He'd have you. You couldn't pretend that you liked it, and he would know sooner or later that I was only his wife on sufferance, as it were. He would have to see his wife looked down upon, and to know all the time, however hard you tried not to show it, that in your opinion I wasn't good enough for him. All that would be bound to weigh with him, however nobly he tried to struggle against it, and that being the case I won't risk it. You see, there's not only myself to consider either, for you to choke down. There's mother, and I will never give her up. If Peter marries me, my mother, and my father, Lady Heriot, must be welcomed guests in my home. I know that *you* consider my mother a social outcast—a sort of moral leper, and a sinner. I leave you to think out for yourself whether that is true, knowing, as we all know, the true facts of the case. But I won't give her up and I won't give up my father either. If I married Peter would you come and stay in the house with my mother, Lady Heriot? Ask her to Valley Royal to stay with you as you would ask me because I was Peter's wife?"

"I can't, Joy. You are asking me to go against my own conscience."

"That's just it, you see. I should be going against my own conscience just as much if I were to give up my mother for the sake of my own happiness, and I will never

come between Peter and *his* mother. I believe—I am almost sure—that if I were to go to Peter now and tell him that I would marry him if he would not go to Valley Royal because you were not prepared to receive me as I thought I ought to be received, he would marry me without a moment's hesitation. But I won't be responsible for a thing like that, and that's why I won't marry him. It's useless to argue round and round the case. I've quite made up my mind, and I'm going away. You must tell Peter whatever you think best. It won't hurt him now. You've been very kind to me while I've been here and I don't bear any malice. I would do exactly the same again if it were necessary You won't mind if I dine upstairs in my own room, will you? I've lots to do and some letters to write and my train leaves early. Good-night, Lady Heriot. I do understand, you know. I quite understand, only you're wrong. Horribly wrong, and you'll realize it one day."

She went out, passing Lord Heriot on the stairs with a gay little nod, and up to her own room. There were arrangements to make and letters to write, as she had said. Sunset Hill to be shut up so that Peter couldn't find her when he came to look for her. Robin and the Scotch tutor to be wired for to meet her in London with Stephen. She was taking no chances. She had learnt her own limitations in those hours in Peter's sick-room, and she knew that, with Peter's arms about her and his lips on hers, she could never hold out against him again, that she would risk everything in the hope of his overlooking it all and being with him for all time if he asked her again.

She was horribly tired, and her head ached almost unbearably. The strain of the past fortnight had told on her much more than she had realized until it was all over and done with. But she stuck to her guns, finished and sealed all the business letters, wired to Robin before she settled to the hardest task of all, and wrote her good-bye letter to Peter himself.

It was past eleven when she finally signed the last letter she would ever write to him, a signature that was blotted and smudged by the tears that not all her self-control could keep back. From her window she could see the hospital lights. In the darkened room in the corner of the

right wing Peter would be sleeping, dreaming of her perhaps, and when he looked for her in the morning he would be given her letter instead and she herself would be going out of his life for always—all time.

She caught her breath in a sob, then flung up her head and choked back the tears. It should *not* be the end. Peter had said that there could not *be* an end. There would be a way out somewhere and Peter would find it. Peter, who always found a way. It *should* not be the end.

CHAPTER XXXI

SHE went back to Fijama at the end of the week, and, later on, to Cayabana till the end of the cold weather, with Stephen, Robin and the young Scotchman, who was getting the boy ready for his first tussle with school entrance-examinations.

The sight of Peter's uniform and the days spent on his ship had definitely decided Stephen on his career in life, even had not Joy so desperately wanted him to make the Navy his profession. He lived in an atmosphere of ships, loved everything to do with the sea, and was so passionately eager to learn the things he understood to be the necessary adjuncts of a sailor's life that Joy was really afraid sometimes of the result, should he fail in his examination. To her surprise, remembering her own inability to learn, he was extraordinarily quick at his lessons and the young tutor, who loved teaching for teaching's sake, did his best—and admirably succeeded—to make lessons things to be looked forward to rather than dreaded.

Halliday had invested in a yacht, a huge white-painted imitation liner, and at the end of April, when the weather began to get hot, he took them all with himself and Cynthia for a trip to see the McInnis' at Fiji Islands.

Eveleigh was still there, the Governor's right hand, as he had been for so many years now, a little older, a little greyer about the temples, limping a little more noticeably, otherwise very little changed from the man who had been Joy's first friend when she landed at Queenstown eight years earlier. He and she sat together on the yacht's white deck the night after their arrival at Suva, while

Cynthia and Halliday took Norah McInnis for a run round the harbour in the motor-boat.

"Still running after shadows, Joy?"

She laughed.

"Running away from them would be nearer the mark, Nigel dear. I seem to spend my life running away from somebody. First Stephen. Then Peter, and now it's Peter again."

"Where's it going to end?"

She shrugged her shoulders.

"Where it is, as far as I can see. Lady Heriot won't give in and neither will I. If I can't marry Peter on my own terms I won't marry him at all, and the family can have the pleasure of seeing the name die out merely because they're stubborn. It's no good holding up the other-woman scare, Nigel. That ghost's laid. If Peter doesn't marry me I'm quite sure he won't marry anyone."

"When did you last see him?"

"In Plymouth eight months ago. They fetched me because he was dying, or they thought he was, and he asked for me."

Eveleigh knocked out his pipe savagely.

"They'll do a thing like that and *yet* not give their consent? Good Lord, Joy——"

She cut in swiftly.

"Don't get cross, Nigel. Lady Heriot did tell me that she wouldn't hold me to my promise. I grant you that. But there's a good deal more behind it. I won't be tolerated and I won't be admitted to the family on sufferance. I'm every bit as mulish as she is, my dear."

"If he's any grit he'd kidnap you—marry you whether you liked it or not. I should."

"I honestly believe you would. Peter can't for the very good reason that he hasn't the remotest idea where I am. I stopped his writing and I don't write to him any more. I had to do something. He was getting out of hand. When things have died down a bit we can meet again and be quite good friends, but he's a bit beyond me just at present. I couldn't hold him."

"Where is he?"

"In the Pacific, trotting round after the Commander-in-Chief. He's flag-lieutenant to his godfather, Admiral Sinclair."

She spoke quite quietly and unemotionally and he could not know that she read every paper from end to end in the hope that somewhere in its columns she might find mention of Peter's name or his doings. She knew from the list of Naval Appointments that he had been granted four months' sick leave before joining his ship, and twice she had seen his name at official functions where the Admiral had been "accompanied by Flag-Lieutenant the Hon. Peter Conway, R.N." She had even seen his photograph once in an illustrated paper, which had pictured him one of the Government House shooting party at some far-away Pacific port. He had looked cross and sulky, horribly bored like a little, peevish child, and she had cut out the photograph and tied it up as she did all the notices of his movements and his old letters, treasuring even the remotest trifles since she had nothing else to treasure.

A letter from Netta Corday, forwarded through her bankers, was her only communication with any of the Heriots during those months that followed Peter's illness in Plymouth, a characteristic letter that was all the more welcome in that it came as such a complete surprise. Netta wrote from Spain—a letter that was far from happy in spite of its gay cynicism. She made no secret of the life they led, wandering from place to place wherever Corday could find a spot to gamble and people of any kind ready to gamble with him.

"We're about as unpopular a couple as you could imagine," she wrote in her square, decided hand. "For of course I shine in Jocelyn's reflected glory. Wherever we go people lose money and as a result no one loves us. He—Jocelyn—is getting reckless now and the police very nearly caught him in Paris and again at Vienna. . . . Peter writes that you've given him the slip again and forbidden him to write. I told you he wouldn't give up without a struggle. We're turned out of the same mould, he and I, and when we undertake a job we invariably stick to it either until we've finished it or it's finished us. My particular job was to love and cherish Jocelyn—save the mark—and I'll do it whatever it costs me. Peter's is to marry you, and sooner or later he'll do it, too. You can stick it out but in the end he'll marry you."

The letter came two days before a paragraph in a London

paper stated that an Englishman named Corday had been arrested in Barcelona on a charge of card-sharping, but had been released as the authorities could prove nothing against him. Joy, knowing the Heriots' pride, was horribly upset, though more because Peter's sister was involved in a particularly unsavoury scandal than for any other reason. She had no real cause to love his people, since but for them she would have been Peter's wife years ago, but she could sympathize with the agonies of mind Lord and Lady Heriot must be suffering at the thought of a daughter of theirs married to a man little better than a common thief.

She wrote to Netta to the address in Spain ignoring the newspaper report, but asking her to come out to her in Fijama with the child if she cared to.

"I'm trusting you not to give me away to Peter," she added, "but I'd love to have you, and it isn't going back on your word or admitting that you were wrong. Any woman, however devoted she may be to her husband, is entitled to a holiday. I'm going to be in Mayagonga all winter and I'm sure you'd love it."

Netta's reply was a cable received a week after Joy got back to Queenstown from Cayabana. "Sailing Tuesday 16th," and she arrived the second week in October with the baby and the nurse. It did not need eyes nearly as sharp as Joy's to read the tragedy of her marriage, despite her gay light-hearted chatter. In Netta's feverish effort to find forgetfulness amongst the "poppied sleep" of pleasure, Joy could see herself exactly as she had been in those early days of her arrival in Queenstown, and she knew exactly what drove the little white and gold beauty into dancing until she could hardly stand, and flitting here, there, and everywhere from morning till night in her attempt to forget the horrors of the past two or three years.

Nigel Eveleigh was the surprise of that winter. He came over to Fijama for his leave, and for the first time since Joy's arrival eight years earlier, found real interest in another woman. Joy watched the little episode with frank curiosity. After the suave courtesy under which Corday hid his real character of a blackguard and a swindler, it was only to be expected that Netta found Eveleigh's blunt, almost abrupt, kindliness appealing. Life with her

husband, spent either alone with him or in the society of his friends, chiefly men like himself, since she was ashamed to cultivate the friendship of people who would have welcomed her gladly for herself but would have barred him, she had learned caution in a hard school and she met Eveleigh's first tentative efforts at friendship with wary, watchful eyes, distrusting all men because of the faith she had lost in one.

"She's afraid of me." Eveleigh watched her one night dancing with a big, young American while he talked to Joy. "In Heaven's name, why?"

"She's afraid of all men, my dear."

"Is her husband any relation to that blackguard who was caught cheating at cards in Spain?"

"The blackguard *is* her husband, my dear Nigel. Didn't you know?"

"Good God!" He smoked savagely for a minute or two, then got up with his usual lack of ceremony. "That sort of thing makes me feel sick," he said, and went away by himself without even turning back to apologize for leaving her.

Later Joy spoke to Netta herself. A very real friendship had developed between them since the younger girl's arrival at Queenstown, and they had reached a point when each dared be honest with the other.

"You're dodging Nigel, Netta. Why? He's my best friend and such a dear."

The bitter smile she was learning to know twisted Netta's lovely little mouth into a travesty of itself.

"I've lost my faith in men's chivalry, my dear. It's usually a cloak to cover the other thing."

"Not with Nigel. He's as straight as a die."

"Also I know my own limits. I've been through such a hell these last four years that I'm afraid of kindness. It's the one thing that weakens my defences. Brutality and the things I've been used to I can stand. They leave me cold. I've had so much of them that it doesn't even make me angry now when Jocelyn's friends take me for the same type as himself. But kindness does for me altogether. And gentleness. It makes me want to say 'thank you for remembering that I used to be a lady,' when Major Eveleigh treats me with the same courtesy

with which he treats you. I'm speechless with gratitude and I'm afraid."

"Of him?"

"Of myself, my dear girl. Which is much worse. I'm my own worst enemy, but I know it, so that I safeguard myself accordingly. There isn't a man living who can make me afraid of him now, but there *is* myself. The men I meet at home don't trouble me. I hate them all without stopping to think about them. Collectively you know. Merely because nothing good, in my opinion, can run alongside Jocelyn. But Major Eveleigh's different, and I'm beginning to realize that my fences want a good deal of overhauling. See?"

Joy saw perfectly well and said nothing more, but she watched the little episode with growing curiosity and rejoiced openly when, little by little, Netta's guarded wariness died and she met Eveleigh frankly on his own ground.

They went up to Mayagonga for Christmas, packed the house full of a noisy crowd of young people, and had as nearly an English Christmas as golden sunshine, a garden ablaze with flowers and the thermometer at 82 degrees in the shade would allow, even to shutting the jalousies and switching on the lights while they played snapdragon amongst shrieks of laughter. It was between tea and dinner that Eveleigh touched Joy's arm.

"Walk to the gate with me, Joy. I've something to say to you."

She looked round at him, her face flushed, her eyes dancing with mock alarm.

"Dear Nigel. Not again? I thought you'd forgotten it all."

It was characteristic of him that, though he flushed dully under his sunburn, he spoke the truth.

"I have. At least I shall never altogether forget. I've reconsidered things, that's all. I'm not like you, and I'm content to admit when I'm beaten and retire gracefully from the scene."

She looked at him sideways out of the corners of her eyes. He was looking past her, and following his gaze she saw Netta, flushed and radiant, banging on the piano, while half-a-dozen children, raked in from the neighbourhood and headed by Stephen and baby Diana, played musical chairs in the middle of the drawing-room floor.

"Is that it, Nigel?" She asked the question under her breath. "Netta?"

"Come outside. I want to talk to you."

She went with him, her eyes still on the lovely little white-and-gold woman at the piano, and out in the avenue before he could speak slipped her hand into his.

"Dear Nigel. I'm so glad."

He squeezed her hand, flushing dully.

"You're taking a good deal for granted, my dear, aren't you? You ought to know the Heriot stubbornness. I think she cares for me and I want you to find out."

"You want *me* to find out? My dear Nigel, she won't tell *me*."

"I don't want any definite promise or anything like that. Not yet anyway. Not until she's had time to digest things. All I want is to know that if things get unbearable for her at home, she'll chuck it and come out to me. Can you tell her that?"

"She'll probably tell me to mind my own business."

"I don't think so. Will you, Joy?"

"I'll do anything for either of you. You know that. After all, I owe you a good deal one way or another."

He stopped to light a cigarette.

"It's difficult to explain exactly what I feel about things, Joy. It's not that my love for you is any less. Can you follow that? It's the quality that's altered, not the quantity, if you can understand. I'm beaten, and I know it. Apart from Conway, I don't think you ever cared for me enough to marry me, did you?"

"No, dear."

"Well, that's what's happened. I tried to break down your resistance and I couldn't, and, as I say, I'm willing to admit when I'm beaten. What I feel for—her," he jerked his head in the direction of the bungalow, "is something quite different. But it's real and it's genuine. It's not the love I gave you. It never can be because, married or single, there'll never be another woman quite like you. But it's a level steady sort of affection, and it'll stand the test of gossip or scandal. Have I made myself plain?"

"The woman who gets you is very lucky, Nigel."

He laughed drily.

"The woman I wanted didn't see eye to eye with that,

did she? Will you tell Netta what I've said, Joy? Or at least as much of it as you think it's necessary for her to know. Put it as well as you can for me. She's off like a pebble out of a catapult if I even begin to tell her, and yet I'm pretty certain—as far as a fellow can be certain with a woman of her type—that she's beginning to care for me a bit."

"I don't think she'll ever leave her husband, Nigel dear."

"I don't think so, either. These Conways seem to be a determined lot. All the same I'd like her to feel that she's got me if things get unbearable."

"I'll try to tell her."

"I knew I could count on you—though the average woman would have boxed my ears after the way I've tried to bully you into marrying me, yourself. You're original, aren't you?"

She answered him equally frankly.

"I never loved you, you see, my dear. That's the difference."

A chorus of voices reached them along the avenue.

"Joy. Where are you? J——oo——y."

"Coming." She raised her voice, called back gaily, then held out her hand to Eveleigh. "I'll do my best, Nigel. Honest I will. And the best of luck, my dear. The very best."

CHAPTER XXXII

THE two girls went back to England together in early April in Halliday's yacht, Joy to a house she had rented in the Midlands, Netta to join her husband in a flat he had taken in town.

Eveleigh, on a year's leave, went with them. His leg was getting worse, the pain at times almost intolerable, and the English doctor in Suva had recommended consultation with a famous London specialist and a possible operation under more modern and up-to-date methods than were possible in Fiji. Halliday, who liked and admired his grit and uncomplaining courage, sent the *Swallow* over to Suva to fetch him; and they went together with Halliday and Cynthia, who were going to spend the summer cruising in the Mediterranean.

He knew exactly where he stood with Netta Corday now. Joy, as ambassador, had done her work well, and if Netta held out no hope at all of ever being more to him than she then was, he knew that she loved him. From the day when Joy had told her the gist of her Christmas conversation with Eveleigh, she had been perfectly frank and honest with him and with herself, as she always was. She had been brought up in a modern school, and had no use for self-consciousness.

"Joy's told me, Nigel." He caught and stored up the inference of his Christian name. "I'm not going to make any secret about things. I hate shams of all sorts. I'm married, and although my husband is all the things he shouldn't be, he's Diana's father, and when I married him I promised to stick to him. We Heriots never make promises which we don't intend to keep. It's our crest, you know. 'Our word is our Bond.' The material side of me is his and will be his as long as he's alive. Nothing can alter that. But I don't love him and I do love you. I didn't think I should ever love anyone again, but you've changed that, re-made my soul if you understand, and you're entitled to your own creations. If you're satisfied with what I can give you, such as it is, it's yours. I'm not ashamed of loving you or of letting people know it, but there can't be anything else. Not any love-making or anything of that sort. Is that enough?"

He took the hand she held out.

"It's enough to go on with. It means a good deal to me to know that you love me. I'm a lonely devil, Netta."

"No lonelier than I am, and I can honestly give you everything of me that's worth having, Nigel. Gladly and more than willingly. Incidentally you've made me very happy and very proud."

He lifted both her hands, laid them against his lips and held them there for a moment, before he dropped them.

"If things get unbearable will you let me help?"

"They'll never be unbearable with your love to help me, my dear," she said gravely.

It almost seemed indeed as though they might be better. Corday had, undoubtedly, had a scare, and incidentally he had raked in enough money to enable him to enjoy

life without risking interference from the police. The people Netta met at the flat on her return from Fijama were of a different stamp from the men and women she had known in the earlier days of her married life, and in those hideous days in Paris and Vienna and in Spain. They were far from being her type, but they were certainly not so entirely impossible as the others, and with the knowledge of Eveleigh and his love in the background of her mind, she lost something of her bitterness and cynical outlook on life.

She and Peter met at Valley Royal for Whitsuntide. His Pacific commission was up, and he was engaged on special work at the Admiralty which kept him in Town save for snatched week-ends, and his first question was of Joy.

"You've been with her, Netta. Tell me about her."

She told him all she knew, withholding the address as she had promised.

"She's just the same, Peter. I don't know *why* she won't marry you. She's crazy about you." She had discovered the newspaper cuttings one day at Fijama, and she told him about them now. "It's pathetic the way she stores up every bit of news about you."

"I can wait my time." Peter's chin took on the stubborn, Heriot angle. "I shall find out the trouble one day and know what to do. I'm determined to marry her."

"I hope you will."

"I'm going to, my dear girl. How's Corday going on?"

"Better. At least he's not so interested in me, which is a blessing for me, and he's been badly frightened. We really seem to be living a tolerably respectable life these days, Peter. The people who come to the flat aren't so awful as they used to be, which is something."

They saw quite a lot of each other during the weeks and months that followed, and because he was really sorry for her and they had been such inseparable friends as children he did his level best to be, at all events, decently civil to Corday when necessity obliged them to meet. He could never altogether hide his dislike of his sister's husband, but he genuinely admired Netta's loyalty, and he honestly tried to do his share and be reasonably agreeable. Of Joy he saw nothing, heard nothing save the scraps of

news which Netta could give him. She was living on the Staffordshire Moors he knew, which was all Netta would tell him. She was well and she was happy, and she sent her love.

"If you see Peter give him my love and tell him everything's just the same. I'm still afraid to see him because I'm like a feather in his hands, but when I'm quite sure of myself I'll write and tell him so. I wish I'd your courage."

He nodded slowly when she read him the letter.

"D'you happen to know *why* she won't marry me? She seems to tell you a lot."

"She does, but I can't get that out of her. I've tried, dozens of times. I believe Nigel knows."

Peter went to see Eveleigh in hospital. The operation was over, but the elder man looked very white and haggard.

"You've had a rotten time. Sorry, old chap. Netta told me you were here."

"Did Netta tell you anything else?"

"About you and her? Yes. The day Corday leaves her free to marry you'll be the best day of her life. But unfortunately he's unlikely to die yet."

Eveleigh smiled faintly.

"The Conways' matrimonial affairs have a knack of getting tied into knots, it seems."

"You're thinkin' of Joy and me. And that reminds me. Netta says you know why Joy won't marry me? Are you at liberty to tell me?"

"No."

"She's bound you over too, I suppose. I thought as much. All right, I can wait. I've waited five years and I'd wait fifty sooner than not get her in the end."

A sudden freakish mood on Corday's part led him to insist on a dinner party to celebrate Netta's twenty-sixth birthday. She did her best to stand out against it, but he had made up his mind and nothing would change it. He made out the list himself, even went to the extent of supervising the menu.

"You're too pretty not to be shown off a bit, my dear." He came over to where Netta sat at her desk writing letters. "A damn sight too pretty. It seems to me that I've not been seeing as much of you lately as I used to do. Any reason for it?"

"None as far as I know." Her voice was level and expressionless. "Is there anything you want?"

"You're an enthusiastic wife, aren't you? We might just as well be friends, Netta. I can turn nasty if I want to. At present I don't want to and I don't care a row of pins what you do. But the time may come when I shall change my mind. I'd advise you to be amiable when it's my wish that you should.

Her conscience was so clear with regard to her own actions that she never even troubled to notice his threat, and he very soon tired of baiting her.

Peter came to the party not because he wanted to but because Netta made such a point of it.

"You're the only member of my own family, Peter. I won't ask Mother or Daddy. They hate Jocelyn so."

"I don't love him myself, you know. We'll probably end by being rude to each other."

"You won't. Please, Peter."

In the end he came grudgingly, hating the whole thing, the men and women who made up the round dozen guests at the daintily-laid table, himself for being present at all. Corday more than anyone else. His shrewd blue eyes sized up the party with very fair accuracy. Four men besides himself and his host, two of them with army rank attached to their names, but who seemed hazy as to their service, and two dissipated looking youths who leered at Netta out of bloodshot eyes and made his blood boil as he looked on and saw them. The women were slightly better, all of them married, one the wife of the man who answered to the name of Major Fielding, the others apparently of the semi-detached species, but all friends together. Peter, used to a different class of people altogether, loathed them all and felt savagely angry that Netta should ever have to sit at a table where the guests were of the type of the present company. Not even the pretty, soft-voiced little woman on his left who lisped and frankly admired him made up to him for dining with such a crowd. He was just getting angry with Netta herself for insisting that he should be present until he saw how cordially she, too, hated it all, how desperately hard she tried to be civil to guests at her own table and to keep the barbed cynicism out of her voice.

If the actual dinner was almost intolerable, the hour

that followed it was worse. Most of the men had drunk a good deal more than was really good for them, and were noisy and boisterous. Corday noisier than anyone. A tall, over-rouged woman in a dress more conspicuous for its absence than its presence, sang twice in a really good contralto, followed by one of the younger men, the sheer crude vulgarity of whose contribution to the evening's amusement made Peter, angrily glaring in his corner, long to cram the words, backed by his own fist, down the singer's throat. Nothing but the stony misery of Netta's face kept him where he was, made him even answer civilly the silly meaningless babble of the woman he had taken in to dinner, and who still sat as near to him as he would allow her to get. Netta sat between the two elder men, white-faced and rigid, her little tawny head held very high, her vivid, scarlet lips set into a thin, tight line, only her miserable eyes bearing witness to the anguish of her tortured soul.

Peter was just getting up to go when Corday, very noisy, not even steady on his feet, reeled over to where she sat.

"Trying to make friends with the Sphinx, Martin." He spoke thickly, but the whole room heard perfectly well what he said, listened rather nervously. "You'll deserve the V.C. if you do. She's like a blasted icicle, aren't you, darling?"

He leant over the back of her chair and at the touch of his hot hand on her bare shoulder, Netta's self-control snapped.

"Don't touch me," she said furiously. "Haven't you humiliated me enough without *touching* me in public?"

"Steady, Netta old girl." Peter crossed the room in two strides, flung an arm round the panting, quivering little figure. "Leave her alone, Corday. She's tired."

"Tired, is she?" One of the older men laid a hand on Corday's shoulder, but he flung it off, white with temper. "I'll teach my wife to be too tired for me to touch her. She wouldn't be too tired if that damned lover of hers came asking to touch her, I'll swear, damn her."

He was fighting drunk and scarcely conscious of his words, but the blazing fury in Peter's blue eyes steadied him and even cowed him.

"That's a lie," young Conway said levelly. "And a damned lie, too, Corday. What's more, you know it. If

you ever breathe a hint of such a foul slander in connection with my sister again, I'll shoot you where you stand, and I don't care who hears me say it."

CHAPTER XXXIII

PETER was striding through the crowd at the corner of Trafalgar Square just before four one frosty October afternoon when he saw Joy ahead of him, waiting for a chance to cross the road. She was alone, wrapped in furs, her little face flushed with the crisp air and her eyes shining as London and its crowded streets never failed to make them shine. Neither money nor possessions nor years rubbed the edge off her enthusiasms. She was twenty-seven, nearly twenty-eight now, but her eyes as they watched the swirling crowds might have been those of a child of eight in London for the first time.

Peter pushed his way to the edge of the pavement just as a policeman held up his arm to make a passage and touched her arm.

"Hullo, Joy."

She swung round, the colour racing into her cheeks.

"Oh, Peter, how lovely. And how you startled me."

The policeman dropped his hand disgustedly. He had stopped the traffic, principally because the starry light in Joy's eyes had waked in his romantic soul a desire to render her a service, and he dropped his hand so suddenly that a fat staff-colonel on his way from the Horse Guards to his club was as nearly as possible run over. But Peter cared nothing for either the constable's wasted chivalry or for the staff-colonel's bodily safety. He had found Joy at last, and he was bundling her into a taxi before she had time either to disappear or to protest.

"W-where are you taking me, Peter? I'm most desperately busy. I'm going to Bristol on the 7.10 train."

Peter leant through the window and gave an address to the driver.

"To tea first of all. I've been workin' like a galley-slave and I want mine. I don't know how you feel about it. After that—well it depends. Why Bristol?"

"I'm going back to Fijama at seven in the morning.

Stephen's at school. He's so proud, Peter. He's learning to be a sailor, like you."

The taxi pulled up with a jerk.

"Come on, Joy. There's a lot we've got to talk over before you go."

He paid the man, pushed open the doors of the tea-shop and followed her in.

"'Member the first time we had tea together? Lord, what ages ago. Ten years, isn't it?"

She nodded, pouring out tea and smiling happily at him over the rim of the teapot.

"You don't stick your tongue out any longer when you pour out. Too grown-up now I s'pose."

"You've got a splendid memory, Peter."

"Where you're concerned, yes. I happen to be in love with you. Are you really goin' to Bristol to-night?"

"M'm. I must. I meant to go this morning because I hate the crush on the boat train, but I changed my mind and went to see Stephen instead. All my luggage is on board."

"Sailin' at seven are you?"

"Yes."

"That's all right then. Easy as droppin' bricks in a pond. I'll run you down in the car. Much nicer than the train, and as long as I'm back by nine-thirty in the mornin' nothin' else matters. We'll dine early—seven—and run down afterwards. It's only a matter of three hours or so. You'll be there by midnight."

"What about you getting back?"

"Oh, I'll be all right. I'll stay the night at the Grand and come back early in the mornin'. That suit you?"

"It would be lovely. You think of the loveliest ways of doing things, Peter. And the boat train's hateful. Full of horrible people who glare at you and wonder if you're worth the trouble of scraping up acquaintance with. The first two days on board are bad enough, but the train's awful."

"I'll go back and get my drivin' coat then and fetch you in time for dinner. That do?" He looked at her suspiciously. "You won't give me the slip again, will you?"

"I promise I won't. On my honour, Peter. Besides,

there's some shopping I must do. Some things I want for Stephen before the shops close, and a couple of letters I must write as well. I shall be through by seven, but I've no earthly right to be wasting time here with you like this."

"The sooner you get it into your head that the time you spend with me is the only time worth anythin' at all, the better for us both, my child," Peter said grimly. "I'm your future husband and entitled to a bit of you, anyway. You seem to overlook that fact. Where are you stayin'? I'll drive you there before I go back to change."

"I believe you don't trust me, even now, Peter. And I'm going to shop before I go back to the hotel. You'll be bored stiff."

"I shan't." He got up and paid the bill. "I'll come with you. I can change while you're writin' your letters. I've a good mind to set a detective on to watch you while I go. You're too slippery by far."

She laughed happily.

"I've missed you too much to give you the slip again, Peter."

"Then why not write to me? Let me know where you are, at all events? You're a funny little devil, Joy. Here I am eatin' my heart out for a word from you, livin' on the scraps of news Netta can give me, and then you come along and say you've missed me. *If* you've missed me, why in Heaven's name didn't you write to me?"

She answered him gravely.

"I've been too afraid of myself, Peter. Those days at Plymouth—they were almost too much for me. As nearly as possible I broke my promise then and I daren't. I must keep my word. Won't you try and understand?"

"I understand you've got some silly idea into your stubborn little head that's got to be rooted out, if that's anythin'. Who made you promise, Joy? You're not engaged to Eveleigh, you know. That was a blind, and it's no good puttin' up that as an argument. I know all about that. Besides, he's got sense enough to know he's out of it and he's runnin' after Netta. I know that, too, for the very good reason that they both told me. Who made you promise not to marry me?"

She hesitated a bare second, then spoke the truth.

"Your mother."

Young Conway whistled softly.

"The—the devil she did. Why?"

"*She* knows, Peter. Perhaps she'll tell you if you ask her."

"Seems as if everyone knew except me. Eveleigh knows too, damn him."

"Don't be cross, Peter. We've so little time together. I meant never to see you again."

"Oh, did you? Perhaps you'll realize the futility of makin' those sort of plans sooner or later. You're the most stubborn little mule I've ever struck."

"I'm no worse than you. I've been telling you at intervals for four years that I won't marry you. And yet here you are again to-day harping on the same string."

"Difference in the cases bein' that I'm right and you're wrong," Peter said calmly. "It's no good, Joy. You've as much chance of gettin' rid of me, eventually, as a rat's got of gettin' out of a trap after he's dead. You can dodge me for a bit, but I'm hanged if I'm goin' to be dodged much longer. If it weren't for this infernal boat in the mornin' I'd take you to Valley Royal now and wring the truth out of the mater in front of you. Look here, give up this trip. Go by next week's boat instead."

"I can't. It's too late. My maid's gone and I haven't any clothes. I've nothing but what I've got on. Literally, Peter. Not a rag. I sent it all early this morning."

He shrugged his shoulders.

"All right. But it makes no odds in the long run. I shall go down to Valley Royal to-morrow and get leave and come out to you. There's one thing. You can't give me the slip in Fijama. It's too small."

They were in the foyer of her hotel, the shopping finished, and she turned and looked at him under the lights, her eyes a little troubled.

"You don't really think I want to give you the slip, do you, Peter?"

"I'm damned if I know what to think, my dear. You say you love me and before I can turn round you've gone. Disappeared. Vanished. I ask why and I get a lot of vague, unsatisfactory answers about promises that can't be broken and suchlike rot. Then I find you like this and

you tell me that you ran away *because* you love me. You'll admit it's a bit bewilderin'. I mayn't be overblessed with brains, but I'm not altogether a fool and I'll be hanged if I can follow your line of reasonin'. You say the mater knows."

"Yes."

"Will she tell me if I ask her?"

She was cornered and she knew it. Knew, too, that she had reached a cul-de-sac, and that she could no longer put him off by subterfuge or vague hints.

"Yes."

"If I think all the fuss is just some silly rubbish, as I'm pretty sure it is, will you marry me then?"

"No, Peter."

"In God's name, why not?"

A man passing looked at them curiously. They made a conspicuous couple amongst the gay chattering throng surging in and out through the swinging doors—the big, sunburnt, young sailor whose tan not even a year of London could rub off, the serious little face of his companion with its earnest, shining eyes and vivid, red lips.

"I promised your mother that I would never marry you until she asked me, Peter. That's why."

He laughed, the tension gone from his voice.

"Then you can arrange the weddin' for—let's see, it's October now—the end of November, my child. I can twist the mater round my little finger. Either of us can. We'll honeymoon at Mayagonga, what?"

She laughed too, though the laugh was not a very happy one.

"We're talking a great deal of rubbish, Peter, and it's time I settled down to my letters. I'll be ready at seven."

"Honest?"

"Honest." She watched him as he strode out of the crowded foyer, all the brightness gone from her eyes, then went slowly to the writing-room.

Ah, well, she had known of course that it couldn't last.

Peter in his little bachelor flat whistled cheerfully while he changed, hunting for the things he wanted and couldn't find. Norton was out—he remembered that Norton's grandmother or aunt or cousin or some vague relation had died, and he'd given the man leave to go to the funeral.

His dress clothes were beautifully laid out on his bed, but it was cold, decidedly chilly, and freezing into the bargain. He wasn't going to drive over a hundred miles in dress clothes and a boiled shirt. Not likely. Funny how things got into unlikely places. His blue serge suit for instance. Where the devil—— He dragged out three others, left them to lie wherever they happened to fall, finally found the one he wanted. Gloves too. Norton had a positive genius for hiding things, but even the gloves turned up at last. Whoever in their senses hid driving gloves amongst shirts? The man's brain was going. Undoubtedly. Must be. He dragged a jaeger-lined coat from a hanger, struggled into it. Bit of luck meeting Joy. By Gad, it was. Beginning to see daylight, too. If his mother knew, he'd soon get the truth out of her. Make her come off her pedestal in double-quick time. So much for a rubbishy lot of promises. He hunted about for cigarettes, crammed a handful into his case. He'd go to Valley Royal to-morrow —no, not to-morrow because he was dining with Eveleigh. Jolly decent chap, Eveleigh. One of the best. The next day then. Find out what was really behind it all and make his mother write to Joy. He could get leave easy enough a bit later and he'd go out to her. They'd be married in Fijama and honeymoon just as he'd said at Mayagonga. His head reeled a little at the thought of honeymooning with Joy amongst the hills at Mayagonga. How pretty she'd looked. An attractive little kid. By Gad, she was. Funny how she put all other women in the shade, how, out of all the women he'd ever met, she held him and blinded him to the charms of anyone else. She wasn't clever or brilliant, either. Just—damn it, she was just Joy. That was all there was to it. Just herself—and a fascinating little slip of a thing, too. He liked little women. She was just right. Jolly good place the world was. Absolutely tophole and no mistake.

He looked round the room with a grin. How Norton would swear, tidy, methodical Norton. The room looked as if it had been hit by a hurricane. Ten minutes to seven? Time he was off!

He switched off the light, went out into the hall and opened the door. The lift had just gone down of course. It would. A favourite trick of all lifts to disappear just

as you wanted them. Stood idle for hours and then shot up out of sight the minute you looked at them. He jammed the button home and turned up his collar. Lord, how cold it was. The lift came up with a clatter, stopped at his floor. He was just going in when a man coming out spoke to him.

"Hullo, Conway."

He turned, saw Corday and frowned. How he hated Netta's suave, bland husband. Apparently Corday'd chosen to forget the night of the party.

"Hullo. Want me?" For the life of him, try as he would, he couldn't keep the antipathy out of his voice.

"Going out? As a matter of fact I want to write a note to catch the early post. I thought if you were in I could write it here."

Conway fished in his pocket, found the key and opened the flat door.

"There's no reason why you shouldn't," he said ungraciously. "I'm goin' out, but there's ink and paper on the writin'-table. Bang the door when you've finished. G'night."

CHAPTER XXXIV

JOY wrote two letters, refusing to think, then dragged a blank sheet of paper in front of her and sat staring at it.

She had realized of course that Peter would have to know sooner or later. Afterwards it just meant taking her chance of his love and his friendship. Marriage she never thought of in these days. That was one of the things hidden at the very bottom of her treasure chest of memories. The day when she'd pictured herself as Peter's wife and the happy mother of Peter's children. She knew quite well that, whatever line Peter took up, Lady Heriot would never climb down, and she herself was just as stubborn—just as proud.

Out there in the foyer she'd thought for one swift second of telling Peter herself, but she couldn't do it when it came to it. She'd just have to take her chance, and things would have to go. She'd tried to fight, tried to hide from Peter

how desperately she loved him. She'd even sacrificed a whole year of him, refused even to see him or to write to him. She'd certainly done all she could to kill his love. It wasn't her fault if it wouldn't die in spite of everything. They could still be friends, of course. Just as they'd always been. Even friendship was better than nothing, and she knew that even the truth wouldn't put an end to their friendship. Left to Peter alone it wouldn't put an end to their love or their marriage either. But there was his mother to fight, and Peter loved his mother and couldn't bear to hurt her, and he was horribly proud of his family and its untarnished record of famous names. As a wife she was undesirable, barred, and it was as well to face the inevitable. The remembrance of Peter as a lover, as the husband her fancy had pictured him, danced like a wickedly mischievous imp before her eyes. Friendship, even the friendship on which she knew she could count, didn't weigh much as compared with the glimpse she had seen of Peter in that other capacity, Peter with his blue eyes ablaze with something that sent all her soul to her lips to meet his, and made her ask nothing better of life than to be his, and stay with him for all time.

A woman cast in a different mould would have looked for the means to effect a compromise. It never struck Joy to think of herself as living with Peter in any other capacity save than as his wife, apart from the fact that Peter's chivalry would never have allowed him to ask of her such a sacrifice. She shook her shoulders resolutely. It wouldn't do to think over things like that or to remember Peter as a lover. That way madness lay. She'd got to suffocate her soul somehow, stifle it or kill it off in some way and blot out all the memories too, forget Peter's kisses and his arms, his voice as she had heard it that night at the Country Club, quiet, steady, inflexible, his smile as he had opened his eyes to find her by his side when they said he was dying. They'd all got to go. In two or three days his mother would tell him the truth and he'd realize that, however great his friendship and love for her might be, she could never be the wife of the last of the Heriots. His mother would never rest until she had driven that home. Driven it home so that he could never overlook it or forget it. He might go on loving her—he probably

would—because he was made that way, but it wouldn't be the same. There'd always be that knowledge between them, the consciousness that she wasn't his equal, wasn't socially *fitted* to be his wife. It was bound to crop up, however tightly they might shut their eyes to it. And even if he were still willing and ready to marry her, willing even to sacrifice his family for love of her, his mother would never climb down. The whole thing reminded her of a baby hitting angrily at a stone wall trying to knock it down. Nothing would alter things. Peter could argue and protest that it made no difference to his feelings. She didn't think it did or would, knowing Peter, but neither Peter's feelings nor her own readiness to give him everything in the world that he wanted could break through Lady Heriot's pride in his good name and her own steely determination not to marry him without his mother's expressed desire that she should. It *was* a stone wall, whichever way you looked at it, shutting you in like a trap without even a corner out of which you could wriggle yourself free.

She dipped her pen in the ink, wrote another note swiftly before her courage died.

"Dear Lady Heriot.—Peter is coming to ask you why I won't marry him. I realize that he ought to know and must know sooner or later, but I haven't the courage to tell him myself. When he asks you, please tell him the reason, though whatever he thinks won't make any difference. I shall never marry him until you yourself ask me, so you needn't be afraid.

"Yours sincerely,

"Joy Barclay."

She stamped and sealed it, blotted it with hands that shook a little just as a page-boy opened the writing-room door.

"Mr. Conway to see you, please, Madame."

She gathered up the three letters together.

"Please post these for me," she said very steadily. "And tell Mr. Conway that I will be there in three minutes."

After the boy had gone she went across to the mirror, straightened her hat, rubbed her cheeks to get out the

little, tight lines about her mouth, which the letter had brought into being.

Then, with her head up and eyes determinedly bright, with, surely, the spirit of all the martyrs of the world dominating her proud little soul, she followed the boy into the foyer where Peter waited for her. She had burnt her boats, but there were five hours yet before they would actually sink.

"I've kept my promise, Peter," she said gaily. "And I'm simply starving. Let's go straight in to dinner, shall we? Look at that baby moon through the window. It's going to be the loveliest drive."

CHAPTER XXXV

DINNER was a gay little meal, thoughtless, regardless of past or of future, asking nothing but enjoyment of the present. Joy refused to think, gave herself up to the happiness of Peter's presence, drank to their next meeting with starry eyes that laughed into his, over the rim of her wine-glass.

It was just striking eight when they left the Collingwood and went out to the car, a clear, bitterly cold night with a baby moon sailing high and white over an indigo-black sky. Joy pulled the collar of her coat closer about her throat, snuggled down cosily in the seat beside the driving wheel.

"It's freezing hard, Peter. What a glorious run it'll be."

Peter grunted, grubbing in the back of the car for a rug. He looked up frowning.

"I've left the bloomin' thing at the flat. Clean forgot it. Go back into the foyer and wait for me, Joy, there's a good girl. I must have the rug and I know exactly where I left it. On the bench inside the flat door. I shan't be five minutes."

She did as she was told, and he strode off through the crowd. The lift was waiting at the flat—only just, though. He heard the summoning bell just as it shot up with him.

"Cold night, sir." The lift-boy swung back the gates to let him out. "Freezin' hard."

"M'm. Feels like it." The gates clanged to in response to a second whirring summons, and he fumbled for the key. Rather to his surprise the lights of the flat were still burning, and he saw Corday at the writing-table.

"You're soon back?" The elder man looked up with his usual bland smile. Horrible smile, Peter thought crossly. Wished he'd finish his letters and go. That was exactly like Corday. Never knew when he wasn't welcome, and had got a knack of ignoring people's obvious dislike and making use of their rooms. It wasn't the first time he'd dropped in like that to kill time, but after all, however much he, Peter, disliked him, the sweep was Netta's husband. You couldn't exactly refuse to have him inside the place. He might take it out of Netta, and you couldn't risk that.

"I've only come for a rug. It's beastly cold. Slam the door hard when you go, will you? The latch sticks a bit."

"I'm waiting till nine if you've no objection. I've got an appointment with a fellow, and it's not worth while going home. I'll phone him, and tell him to call for me here."

Peter nodded ungraciously. He'd every objection in the world, but there you were again. You couldn't turn Netta's husband out very well. Besides, there was no earthly reason why Corday shouldn't stop there if he wanted to. He did his best to be civil.

"Why not phone to the restaurant and tell them to send you up dinner. They feed you quite decently. That is, if you've not already dined."

"Thanks, I think I will. I was going to have some supper later, but I might as well dine in comfort. Many thanks."

"I'll ring 'em up as I go out." Peter was the soul of hospitality. He hated like the devil to be uncivil to guests under his own roof, and, after all, he hadn't got to stay there himself. He might as well be civil to the bounder as long as it cost him nothing more than the price of a dinner, and he hadn't got to stay there while the bounder ate it. He nodded a curt good-night over his shoulder, rang up the restaurant from the 'phone in the little hall, ordered dinner for one to be sent up, and went out with the rug over his arm.

The lift wasn't there. He hesitated for a second, then ran down the steps without waiting, two at a time. It flashed past him as he reached the first floor, flying upwards. Rotten life a lift-boy's, for everlasting bobbing up and down. He looked for the porter to leave a message for Norton that he'd be out to breakfast, couldn't find him and went out without bothering. It wouldn't hurt Norton, anyway, to get an unwanted meal ready. An excellent servant, of course, but never did a hand's turn if he could help it, lazy blighter.

Joy was looking for him in the porch, the collar of her heavy fur coat fastened tightly round her throat. She saw him coming, was in the car before he reached it, and he tucked her in, wrapping the rug carefully round her.

"Warm enough, dear?"

The little everyday term of endearment ran through her blood like an electric current.

"Heaps. We'll have to hurry, Peter. It's getting late."

"She does forty-five, easy, on the level. There's nothin' to fuss about. You'll be aboard by midnight." He slipped in the clutch, threaded his way through the crowded traffic of Piccadilly, swung westwards on to the main road, his whole attention on his job. He only broke the silence twice until they got through the worst of the traffic, once to ask if she were cold, and once to swear at a woman, who dodged dizzily to and fro under the very nose of the long, wicked-looking car. When they left the town behind them he let her out, and they talked desultorily, little snatches of conversation about nothing in particular—Netta, his work, Stephen, her coming trip to Fijama.

"When are you comin' back?"

She shook her head.

"I don't know. When the cold weather's over. I hate the winter and the fog and the wind, Peter. All these years in the sunshine have spoilt me for England and grey skies, though Stephen takes to it like a duck to water. He's heaps stronger and going to Switzerland for the Christmas holidays with his old tutor."

"Are you going to stay in Fijama all the time?"

"No. Norah and Uncle Gerry want me to go to them for a month or six weeks. I'll write and let you know where I am."

"Is that a promise?"

"Yes. Honest, Peter. I'll truly write."

They turned off the main road after they left Swindon, taking a short cut over a road Peter knew and were doing an easy thirty-eight when the engine coughed, spluttered, coughed again, almost apologetically and quietly struck work altogether.

Peter swore softly as he got out to see what was wrong, twisted and tinkered, found nothing amiss until he finally discovered an empty petrol tank

"Well, I'm hanged. I could've sworn she was full up. I looked at the gauge last thing before we started." He peered at the little round disc on the tank, cursed softly as he saw it standing at zero. "I suppose the brute stuck. Oh, well, I've got plenty of petrol on board, so it doesn't really matter." He hammered at the screw top of a tin with a spanner, tipped the petrol it held into the tank, climbed back into the driving seat. "We're goin' well. Ought to be in by midnight with a bit to spare. Comfy?"

He looked down at her half-buried in her furs, hesitated for a second, then leant sideways, flung his arm round her.

"Joy, kiss me."

She flung discretion to the winds. Her boats were burning fast now—horribly fast. Two hours more and the fire would reach the water-line. Only two hours. A hundred and twenty little, little minutes and then—what? Blankness, emptiness, nothingness. What could anything matter now? She lifted her lips to his, gave him back kiss for kiss, recklessly, wildly, conscious of nothing but his nearness, and the never-ending wonder of his love.

He let her go at last, none too sure of himself or of his own self-control, under those intoxicating, clinging lips.

"You're not goin' to tell me now that you don't love me, are you?" His voice shook a little, had lost something of its cool crispness. "After *that*."

"I've always loved you." She was still reckless, still careless of everything, save her love for him and the knowledge that this might be and probably was the last time he would ever kiss her. "There's never been an hour or a day when I haven't loved you. You've always known it."

"Yes." He spoke quietly, struggling to regain his hold

on himself. "You lied, but I knew. Why did you bother to tell me lies, Joy?"

"I told myself lies as well. I didn't want to love you, Peter. Your mother'll tell you why. I've written to her and asked her to tell you."

"If I think the reason's inadequate—and there's no adequate reason in this world or any other why you shouldn't be my wife—will you marry me?"

"I can't. I've told you that I can't. I gave your mother my word of honour."

"If I make my mother ask you, will you marry me then?"

"Yes."

"On your honour, Joy?"

"On my honour."

He laughed softly, triumphantly, caught her in his arms and kissed her again.

"In face of that d'you think anything's comin' between us again? Do you, Joy?"

She clung to him speechlessly and he went on talking, his lips against her little cold cheek.

"There's nothing in this world that can part us and you know it as well as I. I don't care what all this fuss is about, but as surely as I've got you in my arms now I'll keep you. You're as much mine this minute as though all the churches had married us. You know that, don't you?"

She said "yes," her head against the rough tweed of his shoulder, refusing to think, shutting her eyes to the hideous gloom of the future, and he held her where she was, whispering incoherently with his lips on hers. Once she stole a look at him through the lashes of her half-closed eyes and the change in him almost startled her. This was not the Peter she knew. There was nothing of the boy she knew, with the sunny blue eyes and cheerful grin in the man who held her against his heart, in a grip like that of a vice and who muttered incoherently and recklessly under his breath. This Peter was no boy. The sunny blue eyes were blazing with the light she had seen in them once before—on the night at the Country Club. The good-tempered, easy-going mouth had taken a dogged, determined line. His voice was shaking a little, with its cool

crispness gone altogether. She realized that Peter the Boy had vanished in Peter the Man, that the time when she could play fast and loose with him, put him off by vague promises and excuses had gone, and would never come back, that here was no longer her playmate but her man and her master. She shut her eyes again, content to forget everything but the wonder of his voice and the touch of his lips. He was talking without even troubling to expect an answer, as a man only talks to one woman in a lifetime and not always even then.

"I'm no good at sayin' pretty things, Joy. If I'm clumsy it's because I've never had much to do with girls, not seriously. I've never made real love to a woman in my life. I can't put it into words either—what I want to say to you. It's too big for me. You don't need to be *told* that I love you, do you? You know that to me you're the most wonderful thing that ever lived or breathed. I don't know what it is about you. You're such a little thing, and yet you're so wonderful. You make me drunk with the wonder of you. From that day I found you at Fijama, I've thought of nothing and no one but you. I've kept a clean sheet for your sake. There's nothing on it worse than a casual flirtation or two. If there's anythin' decent in me it's because I've tried to make myself worthy of you and your love. For no other reason. I'm not makin' myself out to be a Paragon. I've run straight because I've always had you as a guide, that's all. Let me look at you, Joy. I can't see your eyes. They're the most wonderful eyes, like the brown chrysanthemums we grow at home. Joy, dearest, *dearest.*"

His voice cracked and broke. She knew that all his self-control was stretched almost to breaking-point, in a desperate struggle not to startle or frighten her, and suddenly she put up her hands, laid them one on either side of his strained, tense face and drew his head down to hers.

"Listen, Peter. There's never been anyone really but you I want you to understand. I married Stephen, and I gave him what I know, now, was the gratitude and affection of a child. I *was* a child. I didn't know what love was. Since he died there's been no one, not even a passing thought of anyone but you. I've lived with you in my heart for five years. I've run away from you for your

own good, to try and make you love me less, terrified because I thought I might succeed. If I've been unkind it's because I've had to be. Unless your mother gives way I shan't marry you, but I shall never marry anyone else. There never has been anyone but you, and there never will be. I've done more than just love you. I've made a god of you, set you up and worshipped you. I can't think of anything more wonderful in the world than to be your wife." Her voice shook, but she steadied it with an effort. "If—if things go wrong I want you to know that, whatever happens, there will never be anyone else, and that I shall keep the memory of you enshrined in my heart until I die. That your happiness and your welfare will come first always, and that I would die, gladly and cheerfully now, to save you pain or suffering. Even if I were your wife I couldn't love you more than that, Peter."

She kissed him twice, very gently and quietly, and suddenly he threw back his head.

"And you think that knowin' *that*, I shall ever let you go?" he said grimly. "I don't care what it is, Joy, that's tryin' to keep us apart, and I don't care. I care less now than I ever did. I shall go to Valley Royal, learn the mystery and come out to you, but I shall never rest until I've made you mine in body, as surely and irrevocably as you're mine in spirit. I've made that clear, haven't I? Quite clear? You blessed baby, d'you think that knowin' you loved me I'd let anythin' in this jolly old world come between us now? Not much." He'd got a tight hold on himself again, was the usual Peter she knew. "I suppose we'd better get ahead, what? I hate like the devil to let you go, but I shall be out myself, in a month or so, and, knowin' what I know, I can wait that long."

The car slid forward into the darkness, covered another three or four miles, coughed again, went fifty yards, coughed a little louder.

"What the——" Peter began to get rattled and vaguely worried. They'd wasted a good deal of time back there, and it was nearly half-past ten. Besides the car never went wrong. He took good care of that, coddling it himself like a delicate baby is coddled. He twisted a lever, raced her for a dozen yards, and still she coughed—an apologetic

choky little cough, but a cough, nevertheless, the sort of sound that spelt trouble. "I say, Joy, you're a regular Jonah. I'd never had tyre trouble with the little old bus till the day I took you to Portsmouth. And this one's run like a bird ever since I had her. I wonder what the devil's wrong? Sounds like carburettor."

He switched on the little electric lamp inside the bonnet, unscrewed wires, whistled viciously through tubes and pipes. No obstruction there. Nothing. He tickled up the carburettor, finally banged it savagely, but brought no petrol into its little brass cup. Good Lord! And he'd put two gallons in not five miles back, and she did an easy nineteen to the gallon, even on short runs. He began to get really worried, crawled under the back of the car, poked about with his torch round the tank and choked back the torrent of words that rushed to his lips.

At the bottom of the tank was an almost invisible leak and the tank itself was as dry as a bone.

CHAPTER XXXVI

He came round to the driving seat wondering what on earth Joy was going to say. It was a horrible mix-up, ghastly. He'd got another six or eight gallons of petrol stowed away in the back he knew. Nothing to be gained by taking chances, and he bragged always that he never ran short, had never been hung up for want of petrol at all events. But there wasn't much good putting petrol into a tank for the satisfaction of seeing it run out again. Added to which they were at least eleven miles from the main road and another three, even then, from the nearest garage. It was exceedingly improbable that any car would overtake them on that by-road, whose occupants might send back help, and there wasn't a house or even a cottage for at least nine miles. In addition it was after half-past ten at night.

To spend the balance of a bitterly cold night on the open road was bad enough, but it was nothing to the knowledge of what people would say if it ever got out that he and Joy had stayed the best part of a night, alone and unchaperoned, in a car in an entirely deserted corner of Wilt-

shire. He went hot at the bare thought of it. He knew exactly what they'd say. People's minds were like drains where a pretty woman's name was concerned. A breakdown was common enough, of course, but he'd got to explain what they were doing in that by-road, miles from human habitation, when the obvious thing to do would have been to follow the main road. He wished to heaven he *had* followed it, but he knew quite well why he hadn't. He'd reached a point when he'd got to get the truth out of Joy, and when he'd got to have her in his arms once, at least, before she went away. If he hadn't been so careful of her good name, so desperately anxious that no one should ever be able to cast even the smallest pebble at her, he'd have taken her to the flat. But he'd known, at once, that he couldn't do that. Couldn't possibly lay Joy open to the covert smiles of men they might meet on the stairs or in the lift, and the bland, unseeing gaze of the porter, who would wink at the lift-boy behind their backs. The main road was as bad as a London street for traffic, and he wasn't the type of man to make love to any girl, with one eye on her and one on the possibility of being recognized by a passing car. For himself, he didn't care a hang, but he wasn't going to make Joy feel like a housemaid, meeting her young man on the sly, and being kissed in a public road. Not much. That being so, the by-road had been the only solution. He knew the road perfectly. It *was* a short cut, took off, perhaps, three miles, but it wasn't for the sake of those saved three miles he'd taken it. Useless to blind oneself to facts. It was because he wanted to hold Joy in his arms and to feel her kisses again. He'd done it, too. Dragged the admission of her love for him out of her at last, though the devil only knew what the cost of it was going to be. He could walk to the garage for help, of course. Fourteen miles wouldn't hurt him, but he couldn't see Joy left alone in a lonely country road in the middle of the night, any more than he could see her tramping those same fourteen miles in her ridiculous high-heeled shoes. She couldn't do it, possibly, was physically incapable, and knew that he couldn't leave her alone while he went himself. She hated the dark at any time. He cursed the man who, cleaning the car at the garage that morning, had carefully left the entire tool kit behind,

bar a couple of inadequate spanners. What the devil could he do and what in heaven or t'other place was she going to say?

He came round to where the headlights made a little pool of light on the bumpy road, rubbing the grit off his hands with a handkerchief.

"Found the trouble?" Joy's voice was entirely unruffled, utterly confident of his ability to right any wrong.

"Yes." He stuffed his handkerchief up his sleeve, began to unwind the scarf round his neck and to unfasten the heavy jaeger-lined driving coat. "I say, Joy, I'm infernally sorry. There's a leak in the damned petrol tank and only the devil knows how it got there. I'm goin' to try and rig it up so's we can get on to the garage, but I don't know how long it'll take me. We may be here hours. I daren't risk letting all the petrol run out along this road, and I must make it fairly sound."

"Oh, Peter, what a nuisance for you. Is there anything I can do?"

He stared at her, then sighed with real relief. Not a grouse nor a whine nor a grizzle. No hysterics as to what people would say. Nothing. Just, could she help and what a nuisance. He decided that he might have known that from the first. She wasn't the sort to make a fuss or to create a disturbance. She'd got too clean a mind herself to think rotten things about people, and gave other men and women credit for the same tolerance.

"You can sit there and try not to freeze, my child." He was struggling into heavy mechanic's overalls, preparatory to lying on his back on the road for the next hour or so. "There's a flask—or should be—in the pocket by your side. I always carry one."

"I'm beautifully warm." She wriggled further down into her furs, pulled the heavy rug higher over her knees. "You'll tell me if I can help, Peter?"

"You can help most by just bein' your own toppin' little self." Peter's voice reached her, muffled and thick, from the ground behind her, and she laughed happily. She realized that she was deliciously drowsy. The cold, sharp air and the warmth of her furs and the big rug made her sleepy. Vaguely, indistinctly, she heard sounds of

hammerings, of metal meeting metal, tappings. It had been a wonderful day and a lovely drive. The world was a wonderful place. A few hours longer on the way only meant a few hours longer of Peter. Dear Peter. She smiled drowsily to herself in the darkness. Dear, wonderful Peter.

When, after an hour's fruitless tinkering with totally inadequate tools, he was as far off having mended the tank as he had been at the beginning and told her so, he got no answer. He spoke again, softly, got up to see what had happened when she still did not answer, and saw her fast asleep, her head against the soft jaeger lining of his big coat, her little face almost hidden in the enveloping furs. He stooped, touched her cheek with his lips and she stirred.

"Good-night, Peter darling," she murmured sleepily. "I'm so comfy and warm."

Even the discomfort of the road and the freezing cold that nipped his fingers didn't worry him much after that. He could even whistle while he banged and hammered and wedged, did whistle, though his mouth and eyes were full of grit and dried mud, and still the leak blinked at him. But Joy was tired and she'd had a long busy day. She slept quietly and dreamlessly, never stirring, and at last he got the hole closed up somehow. He wriggled out from under the car, mopped his face and hands. There was nothing of Joy's immaculate lover about him now. His eyes were red and smarted horribly from the grit that had tumbled into them, his hands were filthy and his face little better. He soaked a rag with petrol, rubbed off the worst of the filth, looked at his watch. Four o'clock. Good Lord, he'd been tinkering at the damned thing for nearly six hours. What a God's mercy Joy wasn't an ordinary woman. He pictured the condition some women would have been in—not that they'd really have cared tuppence, he reflected cynically—but because it would seem to be the proper thing to do. Scream and weep and wail over lost reputations and scandal and compromises. Joy did nothing. Wouldn't, of course; just slept peacefully like a little, tired child. The sort of thing she could be trusted to do. No fuss, no bother, nothing. What a girl, and what a wife she was going to make. He touched her

shoulder and she opened sleepy eyes, saw him standing beside her, and sat up thinking.

"Heavens, Peter, I believe I've been sound asleep. I *am* a selfish horror." She rubbed the sleep out of her eyes. "What's the time? Have you got the bus going again?"

"I think so. It'll get us to the garage, anyhow. It's four o'clock."

She chuckled.

"Wouldn't Mrs. Grundy's eyebrows go up? Poor old Peter. You're in a horrible mess."

"So would you be if you'd spent six hours under the bloomin' car instead of sleepin' like an infant. Any idea how pretty you look when you're asleep?"

The colour raced into her cheeks, but she reached up and kissed him, grit and all.

"Dearest Peter," she whispered happily. "I've never *seen* you look such a sight, but I don't think I've ever loved you so much."

It was a quarter to six when they pulled up at the entrance to the quay, still dark and bitterly cold, with the ship towering above them, grey and grim and sinister. At the gangway, early as it was, a nearly distracted maid wrung her hands amongst piles of luggage from which she tearfully refused to be parted. She looked like a distracted hen, shepherding a brood of wilful chickens. Almost collapsed in hysterics of relief at the sight of her little mistress, safe and apparently quite unharmed.

The Chief Officer recognized Joy, greeted her cheerfully.

"Morning, Mrs. Barclay. Thought you'd missed us this time. There's breakfast going in the saloon, if you'd like some."

They went together, she and Peter, demolished coffee and eggs and bacon, before he started back.

"I can't wait to see you off, dear. There's a palaver on at the Admiralty at ten and I've got to be there. I'll go along and get a tub and then bunk."

She was waiting for him as he came on deck twenty minutes later, when the first grey fingers of a wintry dawn were feeling their way tentatively through the darkness, eyes very soft and very bright. He pulled her into a corner, kissed her quickly, and let her go.

"I'll cable the day I sail," he said lightly. "Bless you my darling. You're a wonderful woman."

He was gone in a flash, and until she saw him slipping away through the greying dawn, Londonwards, she stood quite still where he had left her.

Then, as the car disappeared out of sight, she turned and, without a backward look, went to her cabin and locked the door with the last of her boats sinking before her eyes.

CHAPTER XXXVII

BIG BEN struck half-past nine when Peter and the long, wicked-looking car snicked their way in and out of the Whitehall traffic, and turned in under the Admiralty Arch. He compared the big clock with his watch, grinning. Run it fine this time, especially as he'd been told particularly to report at nine-thirty sharp, and to run through some papers that were needed for what he had called the palaver. Oh, well, a miss was as good as a mile, he told himself tranquilly, and, thanks to the tub he'd got on the liner, there was no need to go back to the flat first. He flattered himself that, considering he'd been tinkering at a blooming car on the road all night with no sleep, he looked extraordinarily fresh. The result, his complacent mind said superiorly, of living a decent life and keeping respectable hours. Now, if he'd been up the best part of the night for weeks——

A newspaper placard, stuck on the roadway, caught his eye just as he swung the car round the bend.

"Society Man Found Shot. Tragic Discovery. Full Details."

He read it casually, indifferently. Another poor devil gone West—wondered idly who it was—dismissed it from his mind. Every one went West sooner or later. Matter of time when all's said and done. A brother officer coming down the steps of the Admiralty just as Peter parked the car, looked at the car carelessly, saw its occupant, and stared. Looked away, then stared again.

"Hullo, Skinner. Seen a ghost?"

The other man pulled himself together.

"No. Wasn't expecting to see you, that's all."

"You're dreamin', my dear chap. Didn't you hear the Old Man telling me to be punctual and don't you know that, bein' a well-trained and obedient little officer, I never disobey orders?"

"I forgot. Yes, of course. See you later." Skinner went on a step, a touch of embarrassment in his voice, then turned back. "Seen the papers, Conway?"

"My dear chap, I don't get up in the middle of the night to read papers. I'm a law-abiding subject of Our Gracious Lord the King. I read the papers in peace and comfort *after* I come to work, not before."

"You haven't seen the news then?"

"About the murdered bloke? Only a placard. Anything special?"

The other man looked frankly puzzled.

"Thought you might be interested."

"*Me?* Why, I ask you, should *I* be interested in folks who are silly enough to get shot? Pull yourself together, dear lad. Your brain's wanderin'."

"Look here, Connie. I'm deadly serious. Not foolin' at all. Can you honestly tell me that you don't know who the fellow is who was found shot last night?"

"Why on earth should I know? What're you drivin' at, Skinner? Who is he, anyway?"

"You'd better go and read the papers carefully, I should think. Where were you, anyway? Good Lord, man, it's your sister's husband. That precious brother-in-law of yours—Corday."

Conway stopped short.

"Corday? Oh, rubbish, my dear chap. I left Corday at my place last night, just after eight, as fit as a flea. A damned sight too fit, confound him."

The other man looked him straight between the eyes.

"Yes," he said evenly. "Exactly. And he was found there at eleven by your man with a bullet through his head. You'd better get a paper and read it up, if you honestly don t know."

He was gone before the news had done more than trickle slowly into Peter's dazed brain. Then he went on upstairs, thinking hard. What a devilish business. Corday's death didn't trouble him at all. A good riddance, anyway. But in his flat—*in his flat.* Good Lord, how horrible

How absolutely hellish. And who on earth had shot him? And why? And when? That was what came of doing a decent action. If he hadn't let Corday, much as he hated him, come and wait in his flat, this wouldn't have happened. He would have been shot somewhere else. Beastly! Horrible! The sort of thing Corday would—oh, well, the poor blighter was dead, and, perhaps, he hadn't had much say in the matter. Perhaps——

He pushed open the door of his room, hung up his cap and went over to his own table. Two other men nodded "good-morning," with a queer, startled expression in their eyes, as if they'd scarcely expected to see him. Conway noticed it, subconsciously, remembered that the porter had looked rather the same, and Phillipson on the stairs as they passed. Well, it was natural, of course. With *that* sort of news in the paper they'd hardly expect him to be back at work as if nothing had happened. After all, Corday was his sister's husband, even if he had been a blackguard and a swindler.

He sat down at his desk with his thoughts whirling round him, was endeavouring to concentrate on the papers in front of him when a clerk opened the door.

"The Admiral wishes to speak to Lieutenant Conway, immediately, in his room."

Peter got up. It was no good trying to puzzle out how or why now. He'd got his job to do and he'd got to do it properly. You couldn't let personal things, however closely they hit you, come up against your job. The eyes of the other two men, uncomfortable and embarrassed, met across the intervening space of room, as Peter stalked across the floor and banged the door.

"Takes it coolly, by Gad," the younger of them said admiringly. "As cool as a cucumber, darned if he isn't."

The other man shrugged his shoulders.

"He's a queer chap. Always was. Reserved and quiet rather. How his people'll hate it. They're as proud as the devil."

Peter stalked down the corridor, knocked at the door of a room at the far end, heard the voice of old Admiral Sinclair, his godfather, clear, crisp, authoritative.

"Come in."

He went in tranquilly enough, saw the old man sitting

at his table, his fingers drumming nervously on the blotter. His mouth was drawn into a tight, unhappy line, his face grown suddenly old and grey and ghastly. Behind him were two men in blue serge suits—strangers. Peter wondered who they were.

"You sent for me, sir?"

"Come in and shut the door. Peter, my dear lad—my very dear lad——" the kind old voice broke down, hopelessly, then suddenly steadied again. "Peter, tell these damned fools that they've turned up a blooming mare's nest, and send them about their business."

"What for? Why? Look here, sir——"

The taller of the two men came forward and touched Peter's shoulder.

"Lieutenant Peter Conway?"

Peter said "yes" stupidly. His head was spinning. "What the hell——"

The man's grip on his shoulder tightened.

"I've a warrant here for your arrest, Mr. Conway, on a charge of murdering Mr. Corday at your flat last night. I'm afraid I must ask you to come with me."

CHAPTER XXXVIII

THE days that followed were to Peter, in his loneliness, like incidents in some hideous nightmare. First his arrest, then that horrible interview with his father and mother, beside themselves with grief. With Netta, white as chalk, dumbly, pitifully, utterly miserable, torn between her desperate fear for her adored brother and her relief at her freedom. There had been the inquest. God, would he ever forget the horror of that morning. He'd been there between two warders, listening stupidly, dazedly, bewilderedly to the damning chain of evidence as they forged it, link by link, against him, up to the moment when the coroner had summed up the case to the jury and the foreman without even a moment's hesitation had pronounced the verdict.

"Wilful Murder against Peter William Forsyth Conway."

Dimly through a whirling haze he heard the coroner's level, unemotional voice speaking to him.

"The jury have decided—and I venture to think rightly decided—that the deceased, Jocelyn Corday, met his death at the hands of a fellow-creature. The evidence points to one man alone as being responsible for such a dastardly crime, that man being you, Peter Conway. You are committed to stand your trial on the capital charge before the Assizes on the fourteenth of November next."

He had gathered up his papers and gone, as though it was all a matter of complete indifference to him, and the two warders had marched Peter back again through a side door to avoid the hooting crowd, into a waiting taxi, back to the cell where he'd been ever since that morning when they'd arrested him.

He knew already what the result of the trial would be, knew that he hadn't a leg to stand on. It wasn't enough that his own conscience was as clear as daylight. He'd got to prove his innocence, and he couldn't do it. At least he could only do it by involving Joy, and, of course, that was unthinkable, impossible. He would sooner go to his death, branded as a murderer, than drag Joy's name into the mud and the filth of it all. It wasn't enough for him to say that he wasn't there, couldn't possibly have been there, because at the very hour when, according to the doctor's evidence, Corday had been murdered, he was underneath his car, mending a leak in the petrol tank, in an isolated, unfrequented Wiltshire lane. Even the brilliant young K.C., who sat for hours and tried to wring some satisfactory information out of him, shrugged his shoulders hopelessly.

"Look here, Conway, the sooner you realize your position the better. You're in a damned, nasty hole and so I warn you. Pull yourself together, man, and at least try to help me. I haven't the least desire to think of you afterwards as having been hanged, you know. Try and think, my dear chap. There must be some one who saw you on the road. You left London at eight-fifteen, you say, and went down the Marlborough road. Did you go alone?"

Peter scowled.

"I've told you till I'm sick of tellin' you, Francis. I went out for a run after dinner—meant to stay the night somewhere and come back next mornin'. I had trouble

on the road, got nowhere except into the back o' beyond, and came straight back to the office, where I heard about Corday. That's all I can tell you."

The young Counsel, who knew chivalry when he saw it, and, incidentally knew Peter, eyed him shrewdly.

"Meaning you'd got some woman with you whose name you won't give away?"

"If you like to make romances out of plain straightforward facts, my dear chap, by all means make them. I've given you the facts as they stood."

"What in Heaven's name made you threaten to shoot Corday in the first place?"

"Threaten? Oh, you mean at that infernal party? He insulted my sister. Made a statement about her that was a damned lie. *I* didn't shoot him, but whoever *did*, rid the world of a thorough-goin' blackguard, and my sister of a husband who was a swine. That's all I've got to say about it. Sorry, if I'm unsatisfactory as a client, Francis. I've told you all I can, and if they choose to hang me on that, well they'll have to get on with it, that's all."

"Every blessed thing's against you, Conway. It's only fair to your mother, to your people generally, to clear yourself if you can."

Peter sighed patiently.

"My dear chap, you can rest perfectly assured as to my people's feelin's. Whatever the law may think, *they* know well enough that, much as I disliked him, *I* didn't kill my precious brother-in-law."

"You won't tell me who it was, who was with you in the car that night? Look here, Conway, try and see things this way. Don't you think that if a woman cared enough about you to risk her reputation, by possibly being found with you at that time of night, in some isolated corner of the country, the chances are that she'd a damned sight sooner get her feet muddy than realize that she'd let you get hanged for her sake."

"That's very clever of you, Francis, my lad, but you don't catch me that way. If the law likes to hang me on what they've got, let it. I can't tell them any more."

"*Won't* you mean," the young lawyer said disgustedly. "Quixotism's all right up to a point, Conway. After that it's sheer folly. It's worse. It's insanity. No man

in his sane mind is going to let himself be hanged, when he can get out of the whole thing by a couple of words."

"Then on your showin' I'm insane and they can't hang me," Conway said equably. "It's no good, Francis. I'm sorry, because I've a particular reason for not wishin' either to die or be hanged just now, but I can't help you any further."

"Did you go to the Grand at Marlborough?"

"No, I didn't. I didn't go to any hotel at all. I went nearly to Marlborough and back and I got stuck on the road. I've said so a dozen times. I'd help you if I could, Francis. After all, it's my neck you're tryin' to save, isn't it? It's up to me to put up as good a case as I can, but I can't tell you anything more."

"I'll find that woman somehow."

"All right. You can if you like."

The young K.C. looked round the gloomy little cell.

"Are they bringing you your proper meals and things, Conway? If they're not, I can make things a bit easier for you, perhaps."

"I'm very comfortable, thanks," Peter said dryly. "Considerin' all things, I'm really amazin'ly comfortable. There's nothin' for you to worry about, my dear chap."

The interview with Netta was the worst, far the worst. She came straight across the cell to him, her eyes brimming with tears, right into his arms

"Peter, tell me the truth. I shan't tell. Wild horses won't drag it out of me. You know that I can keep a secret. Was it because of me you did it or just because he'd been extra rude to you?"

He held her at arms' length, looking at her, and then suddenly laughed.

"Bless your heart, my chicken, *I* didn't shoot the blighter. Did you think that it was really I? I know things look pretty black, but I swear that I never touched him."

She drew a long, shuddering breath.

"I've been nearly mad with fear. I thought you'd done it, perhaps, because he'd said some rotten thing about me. Like he did before, when you threatened him. Peter, what is it you're hiding? There *is* something."

"There's nothing, worse luck." He lied steadily, with-

out a flicker. "Just rotten luck. I haven't left him alone in the flat once before. Shouldn't have done then, only I was goin' out and in a hurry. It's all right, Netta, old girl. I'll worry through, somehow."

But he lost his cheerful optimism when he sat alone in his cell, with his thoughts for his only companions, grew grey and haggard, aged twenty years in the fortnight he had to wait for his trial. He wrote to Joy every day, long characteristic letters without a single reference to Corday or to his own precarious position, dated them from the flat, sheet upon sheet of his untidy, sprawling writing, with his whole soul breathing and throbbing and pulsing in every line of them. He knew that the day would come when she would have to know, but, until then, it was quite unnecessary to worry her, and he'd die before he'd hold her name up to gossip and criticism, and to be pecked at by every rotten-minded man or woman who gloried in pulling the names of women, more fortunate, perhaps, than themselves, to pieces.

Francis, the K.C., did his level best, left no stone unturned to prove an alibi, and had to admit that he was beaten. Netta and Eveleigh went over every fraction of evidence, racked their brains to think of any way by which the unknown girl, who they felt sure was mixed up in it somewhere, could be run to earth and forced to own up. Netta was hopelessly at sea. Joy had been, naturally, her first thought, but she had to dismiss her for the very good reason that, being near the Collingwood on the morning of Corday's death, she had gone in to see Joy, only to learn that she had left ten minutes earlier in a taxi, with her luggage and her maid, for Bristol and Fijama. She had even had a note from Joy, giving her a mislaid address which she had wanted, posted the same day from Bristol. She couldn't know, of course, that the letter had been given to a flustered maid to post, who had only remembered it as the train ran into Bristol station. Besides, Joy would never hang back with Peter's life in the balance. Netta knew that Joy would have willingly and cheerfully walked to the stake through the filthiest of mud, would have faced the worst scandal, to have saved Peter a moment's pain. Whoever had been the unknown woman whose name Peter was trying to shield, it couldn't have

been Joy. That was perfectly clear to anyone who knew her, even had she not been already on board a ship bound for the West Indies at the time of the murder.

The night before the trial, Eveleigh went to see Conway; tried, as did every one, to make him speak, failed just as hopelessly.

"Isn't it carrying chivalry, even the Heriot chivalry, too far, Conway?"

"I don't know why you and every one seem to take it for granted that there was a girl in it. It's not as if I were in the habit of taking girls on all-night runs around the country. I'm a perfectly respectable person, and, whoever shot Conway, it wasn't I. I should think there are plenty of people who'd be glad enough to shoot the blighter, myself among them, but I didn't do it and I don't know who did."

He maintained exactly the same attitude when they brought him up for trial and he stood in the dock at the Old Bailey, facing a court crowded to suffocation. Pleaded "Not Guilty" steadily and firmly, and stood with hands resting lightly on the rail, very white, and tired, but perfectly quiet. He knew the verdict before he came. Knew that there *could* be only one with that damning chain of evidence, fitting link into link without even a flaw in its manufacture. But he listened dully while the counsel for the Crown outlined the case, told the grave man on the bench the bare facts of the case as he had linked them, one by one, together.

Norton was the first witness, obviously reluctant, utterly wretched. Keeling, the Crown prosecutor, literally had to drag his unwilling answers out of him. He had come home from a day off, had found the lights burning in the hall and sitting-room, and on the sitting-room floor, the dead gentleman, Mr. Corday. He was quite dead, but only *just* dead, he thought. He sent for the doctor and the police. He didn't know if Lieutenant Conway had been in or not. He thought at first that the motive had been robbery. His master's room was upside down, very untidy, things pulled out and strewn about. Lieutenant Conway had not come back to the flat that night. No, his master was not in the habit of stopping out all night without notice. He spoke indignantly, and Peter smiled. Lieutenant Conway wasn't

that sort of gentleman, very quiet and peaceful, used to read a lot when he came home at nights. Keeling put another question, repeated it when Norton hesitated. No, he couldn't remember any other night when his master had gone out like that, stayed out all night without leaving word.

"It was an unusual thing for him to do?"

"Yes, sir."

Francis got up slowly as the other man sat down. He had a little trick of clutching the collar of his gown and he did it now as he smiled at Norton.

"Isn't it a fact that you were out all day, Norton?"

"Yes, sir." Norton saw his drift in a moment, followed it in a flash.

"And that you were out when Lieutenant Conway returned from his office?"

"I didn't come back till half-past eleven, sir. Lieutenant Conway give me the whole day orf."

"Exactly. So that, had Mr. Conway even desired to leave a message, you would not have been there to receive it?"

"No, sir."

"Is Mr. Conway in the habit of leaving written messages for you in the event of your being out?"

"No, sir. Never."

"So that it is not surprising to you that Mr. Conway went out and left no word that he intended to stay out? To be away all night in fact?"

"No, sir. Unless he left a message with the porter there wasn't no one else he could tell."

"Is the porter on duty all the evening?"

"He goes to his supper for 'arf an hour, sir."

"At what time?"

"Maybe seven, maybe eight, sir. It varies."

"So that it is quite possible he might have been having supper when Mr. Conway went out?"

"Yes, sir. Quite possible."

"Who would be on duty in the hall then?"

"No one, sir. Except the lift boy. He takes messages and such like when the porter's out."

"And if the lift were working, there would be no one in the hall?"

"No, sir. No one."

"Thank you, Norton. That's all."

Francis sat down. Thank God that Norton was no fool, whatever his client might be. The man had caught on at once. How miserable the poor chap had looked. Fond of Conway, probably.

The doctor gave his evidence curtly, mostly technical details, a repetition of the inquest statement. The murdered man had been shot through the head, a clean bullet wound, the bullet fired from an automatic of small calibre, by a practised shot, he judged, since only one bullet could be found, and that had done its work with such deadly certainty. He had been telephoned for at eleven-ten and had come at once. Mr. Corday was dead. In his opinion had been dead about an hour, possibly a little less, certainly not more. The body was still warm and flexible. He would say that the bullet had been fired at very close range, only a yard or two. The flesh round the temple was singed. Death had been instantaneous, must have been.

He gave his evidence curtly, briskly, with the impression that the whole thing was an infernal nuisance, bowed slightly to the Bench when he was released from the box, walked straight out of Court. He was a busy man, had already given the case more time than he could afford. Lost his temper, he supposed, the silly young fool.

Then followed a string of minor witnesses, the police, friends of Corday who knew the antipathy that existed between the prisoner at the bar and the murdered man. Half a dozen of the men and women who had been his guests on the fateful night when he had insulted Netta and Peter had threatened him. Little things in themselves, but colossal when linked up with all the other evidence.

Francis shrugged his shoulders hopelessly. Try as he would, he couldn't see a loophole. He sent a note to Conway.

"For God's sake, tell the truth. It's your only chance. We haven't a leg to stand on." Got the answer he dreaded, while he knew that he would get no other.

"I've told you all there is to tell. It isn't your fault. Tell Norton that I shan't forget his share in my defence."

The lift-boy came next—a slim, pasty-faced little Cock-

ney, his natural impudence frightened out of him by the sight of the red-robed judge, the barristers in their wigs and gowns, the crowded court, and, in the middle of it all, Peter's dead-white face.

Peter tried not to listen while the boy told how he had taken Mr. Conway down in the lift which had brought the other gentleman up. What was the good of listening? He knew perfectly well how the case was going. He hadn't a dog's chance. Rotten luck. Across the court his eye caught Eveleigh's. The poor old chap looked horribly worried. Whoever'd killed Corday had done Eveleigh and Netta a good turn anyhow. Nothing to stop them getting married now. He hoped they'd be happy and not wait long. Netta'd had a rotten time. From the thought of Netta's marriage his thoughts switched to his own, from that to Joy. Oh, well, that was over. There wasn't an earthly chance of the report of the trial getting into the little rag Fijama called its daily newspaper. Besides, much as he wanted to live, and hated the idea of hanging by the neck until he was dead—a beastly idea anyhow—he didn't want Joy in it, little glowing Joy with her untouched, unsmirched purity, and her little air of dignified aloofness. He could bear anything better than that; anything, he repeated savagely, sooner than the sniggers and winks and insinuations that were bound to follow an alibi like his. Good God, it was horrible. All Joy's sweet, clean purity pecked at by vultures of women who would never rest until they'd left her naked and shivering, devoid of every shred of moral clothing. He even saw the headlines, "Romantic Story. Beautiful Society Woman involved." There'd be photographs—hers and his. Horrible! Ghastly! Unthinkable! Anything rather than that. Anything—even hanging, rather than let Joy's good name suffer.

He saw the lift-boy come out of the witness-box, wondered rather dully why luck had been so dead against him. If he'd waited two minutes longer that night the lift would have taken him down. Instead of which he wouldn't keep Joy waiting and he'd run down the stairs. Rotten luck, the whole thing. Funny how he'd had such an easy, happy-go-lucky life, and then come to this.

He saw the judge rise, heard the usher adjourn the

Court for lunch, saw the jurors file, like a lot of imitation soldiers playing at marching, into the jurors' room. One of the warders touched his arm—not bad chaps either of them. He went out of the dock, down a little passage that smelt of damp air and bad ventilation, into another cell. His own lunch was on the table, sent in from a restaurant outside. It struck him suddenly that this was the last meal he'd have sent in from outside. After to-night he'd be like any of those other poor devils in the prison, eating greasy soup with chunks of vegetables floating in it, served in a tin billy-can. He tried to eat the chicken and ham, but they tasted like stale cottonwool, filthy, and he pushed them aside. The cider was better and he drank it thirstily. God, how dry his throat was, like a brick oven. He wondered how long it would last. All the witnesses had been heard. There were only the addresses of the two counsels. Funny, smug face Keeling had, like a sheep. With a fat smug voice to match. He'd been very decent considering his job. Not vindictive or anything. And even——

The door of his cell clanged open to admit his mother, almost indistinguishable under her veil, inarticulate with grief. He put his arms round her, kissed her, held her against his shoulders for a moment in silence.

"You ought not to be here, Mother. Netta promised me not to let you come."

"I haven't been in Court, Peter." Her voice was thick with tears, unrecognizable. "I couldn't do that, but your father told me. I was in the judge's room with Netta. Peter, Mr. Francis is sure you are hiding something. For my sake, for your own, for all our sakes, Peter, won't you tell the whole truth now."

He squared his shoulders.

"I've told every one all there is to tell, Mother." He spoke stubbornly, a hint of impatience behind his weary young voice, the first sign he had shown to the outside world of the horror of his soul. "There is nothing else to say."

The warder came back to fetch Lady Heriot, to take him back to the crowded, palpitating court, but for a moment he detained her.

"Mother, why did you make Joy promise not to marry me?"

Even in her grief the little lady could not forget her pride in her name.

"She was not Professor Beresford's daughter, Peter. Her mother ran away before Joy was born with a man called Halliday. He is Joy's father, and he and her mother were never married. They are not married now. A girl with a shadow like that round her birth is not the wife for Lord Heriot's son."

Peter laughed bitterly. It was the first time his mother had ever heard that tone in his voice.

"You don't think that what you have told me would make any difference, do you, Mother? To my love for Joy? And you forget that Lord Heriot's son is next door to a condemned murderer."

CHAPTER XXXIX

HE went out with the warder, his head up, his eyes bright and hard and careless, into a court that rustled audibly when he appeared in the dock, a warder on either side of him. Somewhere in the centre a woman sobbed hysterically, but it never dawned on her to want to go out and away from the horror of it all. She would have sobbed just as cheerfully at a pathetic play, powdered her nose afterwards and gone home to tea quite happily. One had to get thrills somehow, and a seat at a murder trial cost a good deal less than a stall at the latest melodrama; cost nothing in fact. She sobbed on until the usher shouted "Order," and the door behind the bench opened to admit the judge. Mr. Justice Franton had never hated any job as thoroughly as the one he had on hand. He could remember Peter in petticoats, a funny little chap with very big, periwinkle-blue eyes and an utterly unselfconscious, uncompromising stare, was hideously sorry for his mother sitting in the chambers behind him, her hands clasping and unclasping in her lap. For a second his steel-grey eyes rested on the dock, and the man standing between the two uniformed warders. He was damned if he could bring himself to believe that a man with the soul which he could see through those steady, unflinching blue eyes, could be a murderer—a man who

could shoot his sister's husband under his own roof, and turn up casual and callous at the office next morning, as if nothing had happened.

He settled down to listen, his shrewd eyes raking the packed court-room, resting first on one counsel then on the other, leaving them to flit for a moment to Peter's father, his straight shoulders bowed at last, his fine old face lined as all his seventy-five years had never lined it. Beside him sat Eveleigh, still rather weary-looking, his eyes utterly wretched. Francis, Peter's counsel, was speaking, his clear voice with its unmistakable Oxford inflection and intonation, audible in the farthest corner of the stifling court.

"With your permission I propose to put my client in the box, my lord."

The judge bowed gravely, and at a signal the two warders marched Peter across the floor, stood one on either side of him again, as he mounted the steps of the witness-box and took the oath, his freckled hands on the tattered Bible. It struck him, as he kissed the torn leaves, that if Lord Heriot's son had never been a prominent person in the public eye before, at all events he was going to make a bid for notoriety before he died—no, hanged. He was going to hang by the neck until he was dead. He wished his mind wouldn't keep harping on that one phrase. The way it kept cropping up reminded him of a squirrel in a cage, running round and round on one of those wheel things people put in to amuse the little brutes. He shook himself together. Francis was speaking—asking him questions. Silly questions, the same old thing over and over again. Why couldn't they finish and hang him? Get it over instead of prolonging the agony? He knew he'd a rotten case—absolutely rotten. The chief thing to remember was to keep Joy—his girl—out of it. They'd try to trip him up into giving the show away. Francis had got a suspicion there was somebody in the background. He'd got to listen carefully, answer cautiously, keep Joy out of it whatever they said or asked. God, how his head ached and how hot it was!

Francis' voice again.

"And after dinner, Mr. Conway? Will you tell the Court in your own words exactly what happened?"

Peter told the Court in a level expressionless voice what he had already told Francis and Eveleigh, half a dozen odd solicitors, Netta and his father and mother, a hundred times already. He had left Corday in the flat, gone out for a motor run, intending to stay the night somewhere, had had trouble and got stuck on the road until four in the morning, after which he'd come straight back and gone to the office and been arrested. Nothing else. He'd nothing to hide. He was not in the habit of taking ladies for midnight jaunts into the country, and he could not understand why his counsel should take it for granted that any lady was with him. It was a beautiful night, and he'd gone out for a run. There was an indifferently-mended leak in his petrol tank at this moment. He had certainly expressed his dislike of the dead man. Had once threatened to shoot him. He had insulted his sister, and he, Peter, wasn't going to stand by in silence while a man of that sort made insulting speeches about his sister. Corday had wanted to write a letter, and he'd left him writing it. He was in a hurry and didn't wait for the lift, and he couldn't leave a message with the porter because the porter wasn't there.

The judge nodded once or twice, scrawled notes in a big book with a scratchy quill pen, and Francis sat down.

Keeling did not even take the trouble to cross-examine the prisoner. The whole thing was rather childish, as plain as a pike-staff. Even the jury nodded sepulchrally amongst themselves. Peter went back to the dock, and the Crown Prosecutor got up to address the Court. He said what he had to say in five minutes. The thing was a foregone conclusion, obvious, palpable. Undoubtedly the prisoner was provoked. No man worthy of his salt stood by and listened to insults heaped upon his sister unmoved, but even provocation of that type did not permit a man to kill another. He thought the case was amply proved. Smiled amiably at the jury, bowed to the judge, and sat down to give place to Francis, alert, keen-eyed, showing no sign of the depression he felt. He talked for an hour and a half, steadily, evenly, dovetailing fact into fact. He held up Peter's career and his character for inspection. They could be subjected to the closest, most minute investigation. His client was

an honourable, straightforward English gentleman, the last of a famous family. Even such provocation as he had received could not bring a man of Peter's type to the point of shooting an unarmed fellow-man. He referred to the revolver from which the fatal shot was fired. Peter's revolver was of an altogether different type—a large Service revolver which, when the body was found, was hanging on a wall in its holster in Peter's bedroom, fully loaded. He talked of chivalry and honour, the chivalry for which the Heriots, for generations past, had been famed, which led them to sacrifice even their lives before they could implicate a woman or cause reflections to be cast upon a woman's fair name. He drew a moving picture, entirely imaginary but extraordinarily accurate —had he known it—of Peter and this unknown lady departing for a nocturnal spin. Every one knew the danger of putting one's faith in cars. He smiled, disarmingly, straight into the eyes of the stolid foreman of the jury. Even the best of cars. "Probably, gentlemen of the jury, you, too, have on occasions been held up and placed in awkward positions by the unreliable behaviour, at a critical moment, of even the best of cars." He saw a juryman whisper to his neighbour and lean forward, tightened his grip on the collar of his black gown, and raised his voice a little. At the back of the court a big, burly policeman with a sunburnt, tanned face, edged his way into the packed court-room. He was just coming off duty up West, and had looked in to see "how things was goin' for the young gentleman." Anyone who had had a moment to spare from the central figures in the breathless little drama might have seen him crane forward a little, stare hard at the slim young fellow in the dock, push a step nearer, stare again.

Francis went on talking, a little more confidently now, but with still the same pleading, coaxing note in his voice.

What was more likely than that the unknown lady who could prove his client's alibi was out of reach of papers, or one of those delightful people, of whom every one knew, whose reading of the newspapers was confined to the fashion page, the Court and Personal column, or the births, marriages, and deaths? He knew several ladies who had not the slightest knowledge of a newspaper

outside these items. And, knowing his client's inherent chivalry, the chivalry of any honourable English gentleman, was it likely, gentlemen of the jury, that the prisoner would deliberately save his own neck at the expense of a woman's good name?

"I ask you, gentlemen, would you, yourselves, in my client's position, as honourable English gentlemen, as citizens of a country which ranks chivalry amongst her highest virtues, drag a woman's good name through the mud into what, for all we know, may be permanent unhappiness and utter wretchedness for the sake of saving yourselves from the consequences of an evening's reckless folly? Gentlemen, we have all of us in our time had moments of temporary madness when we have done foolish things and have got off scot free. This is a case when a man's folly has caught him napping. If, as I firmly believe—most firmly and honestly believe—he is shielding the lady who could save him, I ask you, could he do anything else? Could he save his life at the expense of the good name of a woman, who perhaps let her love for him outweigh her discretion? Gentlemen of the jury, would you wish *your* sons to save their necks, and in so doing drag a woman into the mud? Would you? I know that you would not."

He sat down knowing that he had done his best in a hopeless cause, knowing, too, that although his tragic little picture had given the jury subject for thought, it hadn't really swayed them. He glanced furtively at Peter, who nodded and half-smiled, at the judge collecting his notes of evidence, at the jury sitting stolidly in their box.

Peter, following his counsel's eyes, thought he'd never in his life seen twelve such uninteresting-looking objects. Bored to tears they looked, apathy personified. He heard the judge talking, was so sure of the result that he couldn't even bring himself to listen, realized suddenly that he didn't want to listen. What was the good? They were going to hang him, those twelve stolid objects up in the box. Peter felt for his handkerchief, wiped the perspiration from his face. Why didn't the fools speak and get it over?

Through a haze he heard the one word "Guilty," was

astonished that it made so little impression. His whole soul was crying for Joy, aching till it hurt. He'd never known till then how desperately a man could long for the touch of a woman's hands, realized dully why men did so many silly things for women they wanted.

Well, it was over. He wished they'd let him go, or that some one, anyone, would tell that woman in the court to stop crying. Some one was being carried out, fainted probably. The heat was stifling, getting worse. There wasn't any air at all.

". . . that you be hanged by the neck until you are dead. And may God have mercy on your soul."

The same little doggerel lines again . . . a glimpse of his father's tortured old face . . . of Eveleigh, ghastly pale . . . of Francis, gathering up rolls of parchment and foolscap . . . the sound of a woman sobbing . . . the smell of the damp, badly-ventilated passage . . . the taxi . . .

It was over, quite over and he, Peter Conway, the last of the Heriots, was a condemned murderer.

CHAPTER XL

DINNER, or the travesty of it, was just over at Netta's flat on the night of Peter's trial when the electric door-bell jangled every one's tortured nerves by its whirring summons. They were still sitting round the dinner-table, food scarcely touched, Netta, Lord Heriot and Eveleigh. Lady Heriot was in bed, utterly exhausted, completely unnerved. Netta had said, speaking dully, lifelessly, "She's got to be found" for the hundredth time. "There's a woman in it somewhere. Of *course* Peter wouldn't tell." She swung round to Eveleigh fiercely. "Would *you* tell if it had been me? You know you wouldn't."

A rather startled maid said something rather breathlessly about "a policeman" and "some news for his lordship," "something to do with Mr. Peter"; stood aside to let the big burly young constable pass her.

He stood sharply at attention just inside the door, his eyes—blue, like Peter's, Netta thought—drifting slowly

round the table, twisting his helmet nervously in thick, strong fingers.

It was Netta who spoke first.

"You've brought us news. Please come in. Nigel, won't you shut the door? And don't keep us waiting. This is Lord Heriot, and I'm Mr. Conway's sister. If you've anything to tell us, please say it quickly."

"I dunno if what I knows is goin' to 'elp you, miss, milord. Maybe 'tisn't anythink of importance. I don't want to let you think as I know anythink very special, but I know a bit an' p'raps it might 'elp you. I was in court for a bit 'safternoon—comin' orf of duty, you understand, miss?" Netta stood nearest to him, and he talked mostly to her. "I'd nothink to do with the case, and it wasn't till I saw the young gentleman in the box as I recognized him and knew I'd seen him before. I listened to the lawyer talkin' too—him for the defence—about the lady as maybe could prove the young gentleman's alibi and what no one could find, and then I remembered all about 'im, where I'd seen 'im and all."

"Yes?" Netta prompted him gently. "Go on. We're all listening. You saw my brother before? Where?"

"The day as t'other gent—Mr. Corday—was shot, miss—madam"—his eye lit on her wedding-ring and her black gown, put two and two together laboriously—"I was on point duty corner of Trafalgar Square, an' I saw Mr. Conway comin' up from the Admiralty Archway. I've bin on duty there for close on five months an' seen him regular. Not to know 'is name, y'understand, just to see 'im passin'. There were a lot of traffic. 'Twere close on four, an' a busy time, and there were a lady, a young lady, waitin' to cross the street. I saw 'er standin' there—she was too pretty-like to miss—an' I went to 'old up the traffic to let 'er pass acrost. An' just as I got a passage for 'er I saw Mr. Conway speak to 'er, touch 'er arm and say somethink, and they went orf together in a taxi."

Lord Heriot got up from the table. He'd not had much hope till then. Now, well, it was vague, but it was something.

"You didn't notice her particularly, did you, Con-

stable? The young lady, I mean? Enough to be able to tell us anythin' about her?"

"She was little, milord, little an' small altogether an' darkish. Too pretty and sharp-like to miss. You couldn't 'elp noticin' 'er. She looked like a—like a bird, miss, milord. All bright-eyed and sharp-like."

Across the hearth-rug Netta's eyes met Eveleigh's, as they flashed into hers. The description "like a bird —all bright-eyed and sharp-like" fitted only one person in both their minds.

"Nigel." Her voice was tense and strained. "Could it? It *couldn't*, could it, be *Joy*? After all?"

"Steady, dear." Eveleigh's quiet voice broke across the taut silence. "Lord Heriot, will you leave me to see what I can find out? You're dead-beat. Leave this to Netta and me."

"Yes. Go on." The old man spoke wearily. He was almost too done up even to be interested. His thoughts could only grasp one fact and that the knowledge that his son, his only son, was, at that moment, in the condemned cell at Wormwood Scrubs. "Go on, Eveleigh. You'll do it better than I. I'm old and tired and beaten."

Eveleigh pulled out his case, gave the young constable a cigarette, lighted his own and Netta's.

"You don't know the lady? Never seen her before, have you?"

"No, sir."

"Would you know her again?"

"Yes, sir. Easy."

"You haven't a photograph of Joy, have you, Netta?"

"No. She promised me one, but the ones she had taken she didn't like. Peter's got one. In his rooms."

"It doesn't really matter. You say that this was at four o'clock, Constable."

"About four, sir. Might be a bit before or a bit after. But round about four."

"You're sure Mr. Conway spoke to the lady?"

"Quite sure, sir. She looked startled-like at first and then pleased She was wearin' a lot of furs and things, sir. Fair pretty she was."

"What made you so certain of her? You see hundreds of pretty ladies in a day."

"I know'd the young gentleman, sir, for one thing. I always watch out for the folks I know. Helps to pass the time a bit sometimes. And she—the lady—she was that—that sharp-like, sir. You'd got to notice 'er. Her face looked as if it'd got a lighted lamp be'ind it. All lit up and bright-like, sir. I was holdin' up the traffic for 'er and when I looked round to see why she didn't cross over she were talkin' to the young gentleman, him as was tried 'safternoon. Talkin' quick an' excited like."

"You didn't hear anything she said, by any chance?"

"No, sir. Nothink. Mr. Conway, he got a taxi and drove orf with 'er in a hurry seemin'ly. But I saw 'em again, sir, later. I'd just bin relieved an' I was waitin' for a bus to take me down East and I saw 'em in a motor. A big grey motor it was. They was goin' out West, drivin' quite slowly. I saw 'em both quite clearly, sir."

"You're sure of what you say? Absolutely certain?"

"Yes, sir. I'd know 'em both anywhere, sir."

Netta was out in the hall, eyes alight, cheeks flushed with excitement, and Eveleigh heard her at the telephone, her voice trembling.

"I want the Collingwood. I've forgotten the number. Yes, the Collingwood . . . Oh, is that the Collingwood? Can I speak to the manager, please? No, the manager himself, please. It's frightfully important. Mrs. Corday speaking. . . . Is that the manager? This is Mrs. Corday speaking. Yes, Corday. You remember me, don't you, Monsieur Gourret? I'm Lord Heriot's daughter. Yes, thank you. Monsieur Gourret, I want you to help me. Do you remember the day I came to see Mrs. Barclay? She had been staying at the Collingwood, had just left, you told me, for Fijama. Do you remember? Yes. I want to know if she came *back* to the hotel afterwards, in the afternoon or evening. She *did*? Didn't she leave for Fijama then? Oh, I see. The boat sailed early next morning. She went away in a car? Do you remember what time, Monsieur Gourret? Please try. It's frightfully important. Between eight and nine? That's all I wanted. I'm *very* grateful. Very, *very* grateful."

She came back into the dining-room, the colour coming and going in her cheeks, her lovely little mouth quivering.

"Nigel, I believe Peter's saved. I *believe* he's saved. Daddy, don't you understand? It was Joy. She hadn't gone. He was with Joy and she'll come back and tell all these fools where Peter was. Go and tell mother, only tell her carefully, quietly. I'm going to cable to Joy, now. She must come back at once. The minute she gets it. They're bound to wait twenty-one days and we can appeal or do something, can't we? It's a sixteen-day trip, and I don't know how the boats come back. There's only one a week. Nigel—they'll wait, won't they? If they know there's a chance?"

"That'll be all right, ma'am. They'll give you time all right." The young constable got up grinning. He'd been glad to help, but he wanted to get away now. The atmosphere was getting too heavily charged, was too innately intimate. "Very glad to be of service, ma'am, but I'll be gettin' along." He looked at the bit of pink paper on which Eveleigh had scribbled two names and some figures. "I thank you kindly, sir, and you, too, ma'am, but it's against the rules to take money. I'd likely be fired if it came out."

"You've got a wife, haven't you?" Netta was tipping wine into a tumbler, splashing her father's priceless vintage port with reckless hands into the first glass that came handy. "Or a mother or a baby, or somebody. Give it to her—your wife, or anybody, with our love. With our love and our gratitude. You don't know what you've done. I believe you've saved my brother's life. And you've got to drink this, for luck. I don't wonder the police force is such a wonderful thing when they've got men in it like you. Nigel, can't you see that this gets to the Inspector's ears? A man who uses his eyes and his memory like this is wasted on point duty. Oh, we shan't forget. We shan't *ever* forget what you've done."

The constable took the glass, held it for a second level with his eyes.

"I'll drink to the young gentleman's health and his release, ma'am, and your own 'appiness with pleasure." He tossed it off, licking his lips. "An' I'll say good-night an' thank you kindly. I'm glad to 'ave 'elped."

He clicked his heels smartly for a second, but Eveleigh held out his hand.

"You've done us a service we shan't be likely to forget," he said in his quiet, sincere way. "I've got your name and your number. Good-night, Johnson. We're very grateful."

Netta went with him to the door, gave him her hand with her little gracious smile, then suddenly stood on tiptoe and kissed him fairly on the mouth. "You needn't tell your wife, Constable, but I had to prove that I was grateful. If you ever want friends, you can always count on us."

She shut the door behind the big man's crimson, embarrassed face and came back slowly to the dining-room. A rather shocked maid, who had been a witness of the incident on the doorstep, was clearing away the untasted dinner, and Netta stopped her with a little laugh that bordered on hysteria kept in iron control.

"Leave it all, Mary. I'm starving. We've had no dinner. And tell Cook to send up the soup again, hot. We'll have supper instead of dinner. Nigel, I haven't cried once since it all happened, but if I don't laugh now or do something, I shall drown you all in tears. And I don't want to cry now. I want to remember that very probably Peter's safe, and it's all a horrible nightmare—a bad dream. And there's so much to do. Joy to be cabled to—she's due to land to-day—and Mr. Francis to be told, so that Peter can know And to think of the misery we were in until that man came. I kissed him, Nigel, fair and square. Frightened him nearly to death. He literally ran. I wonder if his wife'll come and accuse me of flirting with him. Oh, Nigel——" Her high, gay, overstrained little voice broke suddenly, and the next moment he had her in his arms while she wept her heart out against his shoulder.

He leant over her, his lips very close to hers.

"Since you kissed the constable, sweetheart," he said very gently, "do you think you could bring yourself, now, to kiss me? I've waited a long time."

CHAPTER XLI

THE cable reached Joy the day after she landed, was brought to her as she was having tea at the Cotton Tree with Halliday, who, in the launch, had come over to meet her and take her on to Cayabana.

She signed for it, opened it carelessly, read the two lines it held with cheeks and lips from which every vestige of colour had fled, and passed it over to Halliday speechlessly.

He read it through carefully. "Essential you should return immediately. Peter in terrible danger. Netta." Went back to the beginning, read it again, then laid his big hand over hers.

"If you start to-morrow night you can be in England in fourteen days." His cool common sense steadied her quivering, startled nerves as nothing else could have done. "You'd no idea of this?"

"None. Peter brought me to Bristol. He was all right then. Father, what do you suppose it is?"

"It's impossible to say." He beckoned a bell-boy, sent for a cable form. "What shall I put, dear? 'Sailing to-morrow. Due arrive fourteen days.'"

"It takes sixteen. And there isn't a boat until Saturday."

"I shall take you myself in the yacht. If we leave at once we can be in Cayabana by mid-day to-morrow easily. The *Swallow's* quite ready. I'll cable them to get up steam and we can get away by dusk."

"You're very good to me, Father."

He wrote out the two cables, gave them with the money to the waiting boy. Then smiled across the table.

"I owe you a small debt of gratitude, perhaps you'll remember, my dear. I make a rule of paying my bills."

They steamed out of Cayabana Harbour just after five the following night, Halliday, Cynthia, Joy herself, with a bewildered aggrieved maid, who bitterly resented a second trip over a tossing wintry Atlantic, following so soon on the heels of the first, forging through the heavy seas with every ounce of speed squeezed out of the yacht's racing, palpitating cylinders.

Joy scarcely even dared to think in those ghastly days, when, cut off from any news, she could only wait and pray, dully, that she might be in time. She racked her brains in the endeavour to read the puzzle of Netta's cable. It wasn't illness—not ordinary illness. They wouldn't have sent for her, knowing her to be sixteen days' journey away for an ordinary illness. If he were dying it would be all over in sixteen days. And if it wasn't illness, what could be Peter's terrible danger and why was she essential? She asked herself the same string of questions over and over again as they tossed and rolled amongst the huge grey-green rollers, found no answer, and could only sit with hands that were never still, little restless hands that twisted and untwisted in her lap, staring out over the grey, white-capped water with one prayer endlessly on her lips.

"Oh, God, let me get there in time. Let me get there in time."

They ran into the fag-end of a storm off the coast of Ireland, made scarcely any headway, and were almost driven backwards for the best part of two days. Through it all—while the great rollers hurled themselves at the yacht's steep, white sides, sent her reeling and spinning dizzily, at one moment, to what seemed to be the uttermost depths of the sea, flung her crazily, the next, like a bit of cork to the crest of a colossal grey mountain only to hurl her downwards again a moment later amid sheets of ice-cold water and stinging, salty spray that poured in a ceaseless torrent over her bridge and her shining white decks, Joy, clinging for her life to the rail, peered through reddened smarting eyes from the bridge for the first glimpse of land. At one time it seemed as if the yacht could never hold her own against the cruel, grasping fingers of the gale; that she *must* give up the struggle and stay at the bottom of one of those horrible green troughs into which she staggered and rolled.

At the end of thirty hours of it Halliday on the bridge, with the Captain and Joy, yelled at them through a megaphone made of his two hands.

"It's dropping. We're through the worst."

The Captain, a big, raw-boned Scotchman, tapped the barometer, said "maybe" non-committally with the

caution of his race, but his eyes were a little less strained, his lips a little less tightly-drawn over his yellow, nicotine-stained teeth. Four hours later they were creeping forward again. By daylight next morning had pulled up to their normal speed, and were forging ahead. The first flickering lights of the coast came into sight just before dawn on the sixteenth day. By nine o'clock they had stopped to take the pilot aboard, were creeping up the narrow, tortuous channel, and by noon were berthed alongside the quay from which Joy had waved good-bye to Peter only a little over a month before.

Eveleigh was on the quay to meet her, had been watching for the yacht for three endless days, and she was at his side almost before the gangway was down, a torrent of questions on her lips.

"What's the matter, Nigel? Why did you send for me? Where's Peter?"

"I'll tell you when you've answered one question. Were you with Peter the night before you sailed? Did he bring you here and get held up on the way?"

"Yes." Joy stared puzzled. "Of course he did. We got here just before six and I sailed at seven. What are you driving at, Nigel? Why did Netta cable for me? Where's Peter?"

"Steady, Joy." Eveleigh put a hand on her arm. "It's difficult to explain to you without startling you, and I don't think that now, after what you have told me, there's anything to worry about. Certain formalities will have to be gone through, but nothing else. Are your father and mother coming up to town?"

"Yes. Nigel, what *is* all the mystery? I've been nearly beside myself with worry coming over. Is Peter ill?"

"I'll tell you the whole story in a minute, Joy." Eveleigh's quiet voice acted like a brake on the racing tumult of her thoughts. "Just let's get things settled up here. It's not a thing I can tell you in three minutes. If it had been as easy as that, it wouldn't have been necessary to fetch you back from Fijama two days after you landed there. I've got a car here. Bring Mr. and Mrs. Halliday and leave your maid to come up later with the luggage." He limped forward to greet Halliday and Cynthia at the foot of the gangway, spoke to them swiftly under his

breath before he came back with them to Joy. "Tell your maid what to do, Joy, and let's get on. Netta's waiting for you in town, and there's a good deal to do."

The car was waiting at the wharf gates, and Joy followed Eveleigh's instructions dumbly, automatically, climbing beside him into the front seat, listening dazedly as he talked commonplaces to Cynthia and Halliday in his quiet, unemotional voice. Then as they crept clear of the town she touched his arm.

"Nigel, please. I must know. Where is Peter, and what is the terrible danger? You needn't be afraid that I shall have hysterics or anything like that. Nothing could be worse than what I've been through, thinking and wondering on the way home, picturing him dead—anything. I can't explain to anyone what I've suffered. I've been nearly mad sometimes."

He told her, speaking steadily and evenly, giving her bare facts shorn of all unnecessary details.

"He was as stubborn as a mule. No one could make him budge. It seemed utterly hopeless until on the afternoon of the trial a policeman in Court remembered that he'd seen him speaking to you, that is to say to some one who resembled you. We were sure you'd sailed, remember. Netta went to see you in the morning and missed you by ten minutes. Gourret at the Collingwood said you'd gone on the morning train. She had a note from you post-marked Bristol 2.40 dated that same day. You see how impossible it seemed that it could be you. If you were at Bristol at 2.40 in the afternoon and Peter was at his office in the Admiralty until after four and seen again by half-a-dozen people between eight and nine, how could you be the girl he was trying to shield? And if you weren't, who was? We'd got to prove an alibi. It wasn't enough for him to *say* he wasn't in town, when Corday and he had been seen together at 8.30 and Corday was found shot in his flat at eleven. It had to be proved, you see, and you were the proof. That's why you were sent for."

"But I don't understand. If I were so important a witness how could they try him without even waiting until I got here? *That* isn't justice surely. They weren't even giving him a chance."

"I don't think you *do* understand, Joy, even now. No one even knew you were with Peter at all. That was the trouble. If he'd had an alibi to prove his whereabouts he wouldn't be under sentence of death now."

She sat upright, staring at him.

"D'you mean he never *said* that I was there? Never told them that he couldn't possibly have shot Mr. Corday at eleven because at that very minute he was with me on that road beyond Swindon?"

"You're leaving Peter's chivalry out of the reckoning, my dear. If he'd said he'd been with you—alone all night on a lonely deserted lane—don't you understand what people would have said? All minds aren't like yours and his, you know."

"But I don't see." She wrung her hands. "What does it matter *what* people say? His whole life's in danger. He might have been hanged."

"He would have been but for a constable's good memory for faces," Eveleigh said grimly. "He wouldn't bring you into it, of course, because of what people's rotten minds might think of you. He as good as swore that he was alone. Stuck to his story like a barnacle to a ship's bottom. Only we who knew him guessed he was shielding somebody. The trouble was who. I suppose you understand that you're in for a lot of highly unpleasant notoriety."

"You don't think I mind that, do you?" If he hadn't had too many anxious days and nights just then to see the lighter side of anything he would have laughed at the withering, shrivelling contempt of her voice. "What does it matter what people say and think of me if Peter's safe? It's all lies. You and Netta and his father and mother, you all know it's lies. We had a breakdown, a leak in the petrol tank. It took hours to get it mended. We'd only an hour to spare before the boat left. He had breakfast with me before he went back. Everybody saw him. My maid, the Chief Officer, heaps of people. He was filthy, covered with mud and oil and grit from mending the hole. He had a bath on the ship so that he could go straight back to the office. It's ridiculous to doubt Peter's word. He never lies."

"We know him, my dear. We're different. The

general public and the jury go on facts, and the evidence was dead against him. He hadn't a chance unless he could prove an alibi. We've told him that you've been sent for, and honestly I believe he'd have preferred to die the death of a martyr than get you dragged into it. Quixotic young fool. Preferred to be hanged, which is a beastly end, to getting you talked about, pointed out, subjected to criticism of an undesirable type. Quixotism verging on insanity, of course. But you know what he is. I'm going to take you to Netta first—she wants you all to stay with her—then to the Home Secretary. We've a week on our hands, and of course longer if necessary. There'll be inquiries and things. A lot of formalities, but Peter's as good as a free man this minute."

"Can I see him?"

He looked at her sharply, hesitated, spoke very kindly.

"It could be arranged of course, but I shouldn't, Joy. He'd hate it. You'd both hate it like the devil. He's a man under a death sentence. He'd be allowed to see you only in front of a warder. It'd be horrible. Won't you wait? You don't want him to remember that you've seen him in a cell in the clothes of a convicted murderer, do you? The surroundings aren't pretty."

She sat very still, tried to imagine her Peter in the hideous garments of a convicted criminal, the broad arrow stamped all over them. Peter was so smart, so fresh, so gaily, splendidly debonair. It was impossible to think of him in horrible shapeless sacks with that damning arrow blazoned all over them. Other men, yes. But Peter? No, a thousand times No! Nigel was right. She knew that. Peter would hate it. He was so fussy about his appearance, that every detail should be beyond criticism. How he must be loathing it all. The awful-hideous loneliness, the confinement, the ignominy of it. And he had suffered it all, everything, was prepared to suffer more still even to the forfeiting of his own life, rather than that she should be hurt or be pointed at as a woman of questionable character.

The depth of his love for her stunned and dazed her, left her breathless, aghast at the colossal unselfishness of it. She tried to grasp all that he had done, but her brain reeled and swam She could only keep on telling herself

that he'd been willing to die rather than that even a chance word should sully her fresh sweet purity.

"I can't realize it." She spoke under her breath, wonderingly. "I'm not fit to be loved like that. No woman is. It's the sort of thing God would do, not just a man. I *can't* realize it, Nigel. It's too big to grasp. And I can do nothing to repay him. Nothing."

"You can pocket your pride and marry him, my dear," Eveleigh said dryly. "That's one way of liquidating the debt if you care to take it."

CHAPTER XLII

WHAT happened afterwards was so rushed, such a blur of emotions that Joy remembered very little of what really took place during the week that intervened between her interview with the Home Secretary, two hours after her arrival in town, and the day when she found herself sitting between Peter's mother and her own in the judge's chambers at the Law Courts waiting to give her evidence.

The Home Secretary had been very kind to her. She remembered that. A thin-faced, rather severe-looking person, wearing rimless glasses, who listened with grave attention and meticulous care to everything she said, making notes of hours and dates, querying possible discrepancies. At the end he had smiled at her, and she had wondered dimly how she had ever thought him severe.

"There will be the usual inquiry, Mrs. Barclay, and you'll be subpœnaed, of course." He smiled again, a smile that transformed his entire face. "Though I hardly think that, after racing the best part of five thousand miles to get here in time that you'll need a subpœna. The constable who remembered you—a smart chap that, by the way—will have to appear, and the manager of the Collingwood, who can prove that you dined there on the night in question. It's a perfectly clear case, of course. But the law's got to take its course. You understand that, don't you?" He stood up. "If you'd like to see Mr. Conway——"

Joy shook her head nervously.

"I'd rather not. He'd hate it so. I did want to at first, but I've realized since that it would be horrible for him. It's very kind of you, Sir Henry, but I'd rather wait until—until it's all over. And I'm very, very grateful."

Norris held out his hand, looking down at the grave, serious little face.

"I think you're wise. It isn't necessary to tell you how glad I am, though I hope to have the opportunity of congratulating Conway later. I'll do my best to hurry things through, as much as possible, but if the law, which is a cumbersome machine, moves more slowly than you think reasonable, remember that there are others besides myself to be blamed, and of your charity be merciful."

After that she had a hazy recollection of standing in a row at Scotland Yard with twenty-nine other women of every conceivable type and appearance, while a burly young constable, with blue eyes that reminded her of Peter, stolidly marched along the row looking for the girl he remembered. She would never forget the sick agony in which she had prayed for recognition, nor the awful surge of relief over her whole body when, out of the heterogeneous collection of women, his eye had rested on her and then gone no further in the search.

"You're absolutely certain, Johnson?" A thin, hungry-looking man with an inquisitive nose glared at the young policeman, who stared back at him unembarrassed, unalarmed, utterly unshaken.

"Yes, sir. Quite certain, sir. I'd know the young lady anywheres, sir. I'm certain that's her."

Now she sat between Peter's mother and her own in the big, ugly chambers, waiting. So absorbed in her thoughts was she that she barely heard Lady Heriot's voice.

"You'll forgive me, Joy? And you, Cynthia? I've been a foolish woman and an unpardonable snob, but you'll forgive me and marry Peter, won't you, Joy?"

She heard Cynthia say something in rather a strangled tone, saw the hands of the two women meet. Vaguely she realized that the barrier was down, the past dead. She was to be Peter's wife, his accepted wife. She'd have married him in any case after this, whether his mother

had asked her or not. She was quite sure of that, since if Peter had been ready to sacrifice his life for her sake, knowing her to be what she was, the least she could do was to pocket her own pride. Still, it was nice to think that she was going to be welcomed rather than tolerated by Peter's father and mother, and very nice to see her own mother and Peter's talking so happily together. She wished she could grasp things better. She heard things as from such a distance, everything seemed so blurred and indistinct, even Lady Heriot's voice when she said:

"You'll come back with us to Valley Royal, won't you, Cynthia? You and Mr. Halliday, and let bygones be bygones?"

Beyond the heavy doors she could hear voices. She had never been inside a court in her life, hadn't the faintest idea what it would all be like. She hoped there wouldn't be a very big crowd, that they wouldn't stare at her, that she would be able to stand where she could see Peter, and so feel herself safe from whatever the crowd said or looked. She'd a very shrewd suspicion of the sort of things they would say. The obvious comments on a woman who spent all night alone in a deserted lane with a very personable young man. But whatever they said or whatever they were going to say, the story had to be told. The thought of the newspapers made her feel rather sick, the photographs, and the lurid, suggestive headlines danced dizzily in front of her eyes. She pushed away the picture of them resolutely. What did they matter? What did anything matter with Peter's life hanging by a thread? Peter, who loved her and for whom she would willingly and gladly have died.

A stentorian voice roused her.

"Joy Barclay."

She stood up, still in that dim haze of unreality, saw the door open and heard another voice.

"Will you come now, Mrs. Barclay?" realized that it was Francis who spoke, followed him dumbly into a court where there wasn't a vacant square inch of room. To-day had been the day fixed for Peter's execution, and since the crowd had been deprived of the satisfaction of crowding round the prison walls to hear the bell tolled, and to see the notice of execution nailed on to the gates, they

had done the next best thing, and surged and swarmed into Court to listen with ghoulish enjoyment to a helpless woman's conduct, held up to jibes and jeers and bitter, cynical criticism.

Her first impression was of a sea of faces, indistinguishable, rising tier upon tier, and a rustle, swift, sibilant, running through the room as she followed her guide to the witness-box. Vainly she looked for Peter, saw nothing but the blur of faces, and a little nearer and clearer the red robes of the judges, and the bewigged barristers just below her. Gradually, as her brain steadied, and while Keeling, looking rather bored and exactly like a sheep, gathered his papers together, she looked about her, saw Netta sitting with Nigel Eveleigh at the barristers' table, beside her, Lord Heriot and her own father and the smiling young K.C., who already saw another leaf added to his crown of laurels. Still no sign of Peter. Some one put a Bible in her hands, a torn, dilapidated looking object, made her repeat a jumble of words after him, took the Bible away again. She saw Netta smile reassuringly, a little, gay, confident smile, let her eyes wander round the court, past the sea of faces, past the wigs and gowns of the barristers, past the busy scribbling reporters, past——

Her wandering eyes came to a sudden stop, rested on a railed-off kind of pen, saw Peter at last, very straight, very white, smiling a tight-lipped, horribly strained little smile out of deceptively-gay, reckless, blue eyes.

Her hands gripped the edge of the box. It was all she could do not to dash down the steps and across the room, to kiss the agony of suspense from those strained, pathetically-cheerful eyes, to take his head between her hands and hide from the curious eyes of the world the brave deceptive gaiety of his eyes against her heart, to kill all the people who had dared, *dared* bring that look of tense, strained courage to Peter's face.

Dimly she heard Keeling's voice, realized that she was expected to answer questions, pulled herself together. She kept her eyes fixed on Peter while she told the sheep-like person in the funny curly wig all the things he wanted to know, such ridiculous questions, what time they had left London, the road they had taken, the time they had broken down, the time they had reached the ship. If she

had known it, Keeling was letting her down very lightly, asking her nothing more than his duty compelled him to ask, and even doing that duty with scant interest, since he was both a gentleman and a sportsman, but she grudged every moment that kept her from Peter, and hated him for the apparently foolish details he wanted to know.

When Keeling sat down Francis took his place, asked more questions before he let her go. She had been in the box barely fifteen minutes, though it seemed like an eternity. Netta made room for her between herself and Nigel, squeezing her hand under the table, and she listened dully while the young constable who had identified her yesterday gave his evidence, stolidly, unshakably, like a well-oiled machine. Monsieur Gourret, the manager of the Collingwood, came next, very voluble, very Latin in his excitement, equally sure of his statement. Undoubtedly Mrs. Barclay had dined at his hotel on the night in question. He remembered it because he really thought that she had already sailed, was astonished when she came back. He had known her for years—many years, He spread out fat, white hands. Being wise in her generation, Mrs. Barclay always stayed under his hospitable roof. He was enchanted, charmed to be of use to her, or to her so distinguished fiancé.

The so distinguished fiancé, under sentence of death, with a warder on either side of him, grinned for the first time for over a month, and in that grin, spontaneous, uncontrollable, bubbling with sheer, irresistible amusement, Peter won for himself, and the girl who loved him, the goodwill and sympathy of every man and woman in the packed, suffocating court. He saw it reflected for an instant on even Keeling's sheeplike face, as he rose to cross-examine the first officer of the ship on which Joy had sailed, and who had welcomed them both on their arrival at the quay. Saw it again flicker for a second in the grave, kind eyes of the judges on the Bench, heard the rustle of relaxation as it trickled across the faces of the tense listeners. Drew a sudden, little, sobbing breath. For the first time since that day, three weeks earlier, he could feel the tension of the rope slackening about his neck, knew, to his horror, that he was on the verge of hysteria, found Joy's starry eyes just in time, and kept

his own on them, steadily, inflexibly, refusing to think of the rope which had been his constant companion for twenty-one endless days and nights.

The tension of the stifling court had slackened perceptibly just like the rope, Peter found himself thinking. All the world loves a lover, treasures a love-story. Women who had come to throw mud at a weaker, frailer vessel dried their eyes openly, smiled at each other before that worshipping light in Peter's eyes. Men found a lump in their throats, coughed rather ostentatiously, and reporters, who had arrived with visions of a snappy, rather risqué story, changed the tone of their copy, and made of it instead, a pathetic, appealing story of a man's chivalry and a woman's courage. Here and there one sketched both the prisoner and the prisoner's little fur-clad fiancée, whose eyes held each other's reckless of curious eyes or scratching pencils.

The last witness for the defence—the steward, who had brushed Peter's dusty suit when he'd had a hasty tub on board the *West Indian*, stumped down the steps of the witness-box. Francis said, "That is the case for the defence, my lord," in his rather nasal Oxford voice, and left it at that, and Keeling got up slowly, speaking in his deliberate, sleepy way.

"In view of the evidence to-day, my lord, there is nothing for me to do but to ask that the prisoner may be acquitted, and that the coroner's verdict may be amended accordingly. I should like to state publicly my great satisfaction, that, owing to the smartness of Police-Constable Johnson, a comparatively young member of the Force, a very grave miscarriage of justice has been averted. The alibi is amply proved. Mr. Corday was undoubtedly shot, and by whom we do not know. We only know, beyond all shadow of doubt, that he had many enemies, and that Mr. Conway could not possibly have fired the shot which killed him, since we have ample and conclusive evidence that at the time of Mr. Corday's death Mr. Conway was at least seventy miles out of London. I should like to congratulate Mr. Conway on his chivalry, while I condemn him for his exaggerated sense of Quixotism. But for one man's quickness of perception and excellent memory for faces, he would be in a very different place

at this moment than he now is. It is with great pleasure that I formally ask for Mr. Conway's acquittal, my lord."

The senior judge said something in a kind, entirely personal tone to the prisoner in the dock, and Peter grinned back cheerfully and bowed. The cheer that some one started, as the two warders stood aside to let him pass out of the dock, was squashed at its birth by the usher's stentorian "Order!" and, as the Court rose, a thin, blue-clad figure with very straight shoulders and fair hair too-closely cropped, crossed the court-room floor to where a girl in heavy furs sobbed helplessly and uncontrollably with her head buried in her arms on the barristers' table. The people who had waited to shake hands with him backed away, and busied themselves with desultory conversation. Francis said, "See you later, you silly young fool," and went out, and Netta, with Nigel and Lord Heriot, turned their backs, although two of them at least were aching for a word or a look from their adored son and brother.

But Peter had eyes for no one but the girl sobbing helplessly at the table. Regardless of possible watching eyes he picked her up bodily, found her lips under the halo of her damp, tumbled hair, kissed them once with a quick, fierce passion, and put her back on her feet.

"I've got a licence in my pocket, Joy darlin'," he said unsteadily. "Francis fixed it for me this mornin'. If you're not afraid of marryin' a condemned murderer, shall we go along now and use it. I think your arms round my neck are the only things that'll ever make me forget the feelin' of a rope. Will you come, sweetheart?"

She slipped her hand in his, and hand in hand, like children, without a look or a word for any one of the little waiting crowd, they went out together through the sunlight into the Promised Land, which was theirs at last.

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